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sinister wisdom
six



SINISTER WISDOM 6

*A Journal of Words and Pictures for the Lesbian
Imagination in All Women*

Summer, 1978

**We are moving
to Lincoln, Nebraska.**

**We are moving
to four issues a year.**

(See page 2 for details.)

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Sinister Wisdom
P.O. Box 30541
Lincoln, Nebraska
68503**

Editors: *Harriet Desmoines
Catherine Nicholson*

Poetry Editor: *Susan Leigh
Star*

This issue edited by:
*Catherine, Harriet, and
Mab Segrest*

Design and art work:
Beth Hodges

Technical Assistance:
*Debbie Alicen and
Lynn Crisco*

Cover by Beth Hodges

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PLEASE RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS

Dear Sisters,

This issue #6 marks the end of *Sinister Wisdom's* second year--an event calling for celebration and congratulations all around. To all of you who, in so many different ways, caused the lady to survive and flourish, our deepest thanks. We all deserve to give ourselves a Big Party....

You may have noticed that this is *not* the double issue promised last time. (Everything that is not in #6 will be in #7...and more!) We didn't have enough cash-on-hand to print a double issue. Also, we finally realized that most wymyn wanted *Sinister Wisdom* to come out more often instead. So, beginning with issue #7, fall 1978, *Sinister Wisdom* becomes a quarterly--4 issues, instead of 3, a year.

The rate for new subscriptions and renewals after July, 1978, is \$7.50 a year. This is a jump, but not as big a jump as it looks. Formerly, you paid \$4.50 for 3 issues, which works out to \$1.50 an issue; now you pay \$7.50 for 4 issues, which works out to \$1.87 for each 100-108 pp. issue. (Subscribing for 8 issues reduces the cost to \$1.63 an issue.) We are less than thrilled about this increase; however, without it, *Sinister Wisdom* dies of a broken pocket book. (The increase is *not* due to typesetting; that we have managed so far on an exchange-of-labor basis.)

Our other big news is that soon after issue #5 came out, we were invited to move to Lincoln, Nebraska, by a group of wymyn there who promised to work on the magazine. By the time this issue is printed, *Sinister Wisdom* will be located in Lincoln. (New address: Box 30541, Lincoln, NE 68503) Now, in the midst of a chaos of packing boxes, clingy cats, and unanswered correspondence, we're simultaneously looking forward and back--forward, to new energy in a new space; back, with a renewed appreciation of what this Lesbian community in Charlotte has meant to both of us, and to the magazine.

Apologies are due from us to the wymyn who, in the last year, have written letters or sent in manuscripts, only to receive delayed replies, or--in a few cases--no reply at all. Our first priority now is to change this situation and make sure it doesn't happen again--that no wymyn who works on *Sinister Wisdom* in the future becomes so burned out that she loses the capacity to respond.

Our endings are also beginnings: North Carolina's *Feminary* is now a Lesbian feminist journal for the South. (See announcement on last page of this issue.) And the 1st Annual Southeastern Lesbian Writing and Publishing Conference (a focused, non-hierarchically organized working weekend in the country) is set for October 13-15, 1978. (Send to "Woman Writes," Box 5502, Atlanta, Ga. 30307 for more information.)

-Catherine and Harriet

*«your silence
will not
save you...»*

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SILENCE INTO LANGUAGE AND ACTION

The Lesbians and Literature Panel of the 1977 ANNUAL MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION, December, Chicago. Chair: **Julia P. Stanley**; Participants: **Mary Daly, Audre Lorde, Judith McDaniel, Adrienne Rich**. Attended by 700 women.

Julia Penelope Stanley:

This afternoon's panel grew out of an MLA panel last year on which Audre Lorde, June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, and Honor Moore spoke to us about the relationship between their identity as wimmin, as Blacks, as Lesbians, and their poetry. Last year I learned how little wimmin understand about any of the language that I claim as essential to my identity.

Too often in my past I've felt alienated in an environment such as this, felt that the structure, atmosphere, architecture, of academic meetings eroded, devoured the meaning of my words, made my syntax hemorrhage; I would feel my connections to my language drain away, dissolve. Last year at MLA I sat with tears in my eyes listening to an unknown woman object to Adrienne Rich's statement that there "is a Lesbian in every woman," saying that she could not accept the "freudian implications of the word *Lesbian*." I raged in silence, torn, wounded, not knowing how to explain that, although I had loved wimmin, and only wimmin, emotionally, physically, sexually, for 24 years, I had not been able to let the word *Lesbian* pass my lips in all those years; that in 1972, when I first tried to apply that name to myself, I stuttered, I whispered, I choked. Last year, I still didn't know how to explain the importance of that word in my life to other wimmin. This panel grew out of my silence last year.

Naming ourselves; naming our lives; naming our actions. Without language, I am nameless, I am invisible, I am silent. If I refuse language, I refuse myself. Through my language, I define myself to myself; I can "see" myself. My language always goes before me, illuminating my actions; through my language, I create myself, for myself, and for other wimmin.

Last year, I found myself telling another woman my coming out story, the story of how and when I had become a Lesbian, in all the senses in

which I now use that word. I was telling her the story of my life. I halted, stumbled, paused through that narration. My story was broken by long silences while I groped in my mind for words, phrases, metaphors through which I might communicate myself to her. I wanted her to understand me as I understand me, and I discovered in that telling that my life, my coming out, was a narrative of silences, the silence of denial, of self-hatred, of pain. Later, I told another woman of that long and painful narration. She asked, "Did you tell her everything?" I said, "Yes. Everything I thought was important." She said, once again, "Did you tell her everything? Did you tell her about your long silences with other wimmin?" And I was glad that I could say, "Yes. I told her about my long silences, my pain, my muteness."

Too many of us still want to believe that language is a trivial, irrelevant issue, that it is not a wimmin's concern. The patriarchy devalues language in two ways: First, we are told that continued use of masculinist English, e.g., *he, man, mankind, bitch, chairman*, etc., is "correct," and that changing the language is both useless *and* impossible! Second, within the patriarchy, language is used to deceive, to coerce, to protect those who hold power. Wimmin can't allow the boys to continue to control English (or any other language). We must make English our own, in our way, to serve *our* purposes. We must end the millenia of silence about our lives; if we don't, we will be unable to define our lives in ways that're different from what we know now. As a Lesbian, I understand the importance of language in my life. With language, I can claim aspects of myself that I've denied, express ideas that have been suppressed and tabooed for a long time. With language, I can define my life as real, and I can act to change my life. The wimmin I've asked to be here this afternoon understand language and silence and language and action--

MARY DALY:

The first and essential point which I'd like to make is that we exist in a State of Possession. Secondly, I'd like to talk about the fact that we exist in a State of War, and after that I'll be speaking of female friendship.

When I began to try to think about the State of Possession, I realized that words fail. It isn't only a matter of having to create new words but having to look into the deep Background of the very old words, which are women's words. For example, *Hag, Harpy, Crone, Fury, Spinster*.

Hagiography is a term employed by Christians, and is defined as "the biography of saints; saints' lives; biography of an idealizing or idolizing character." *Hagiology* has a similar meaning; it is "a description of sacred writings or sacred persons." Both of these terms are from the Greek *hagios*, meaning holy. Surviving, moving women can hardly look to the masochistic martyrs of sadospiritual religion as models. Since most patriarchal writing that purports to deal with women is pornography or hagiography (which amount to the same thing), women in a world from which woman-identified writing has been eliminated are try-

ing to break away from these moldy "models," both of writing and of living. Our forefathers were the Great Hags whom the institutionally powerful *but* privately impotent patriarchs found too threatening for coexistence, and whom historians erase. *Hag* is from an Old English word meaning harpy, witch. Webster's gives as the first and "archaic" meaning of *hag*: a female demon: "FURY, HARPY." It also formerly meant: "an evil or frightening spirit." (Lest this sound too negative, we should ask the relevant questions: "Evil" by whose definition? "Frightening" to whom?) A third archaic definition of *hag* is "nightmare."[†] (The important question is: Whose nightmare?) *Hag* is also defined as "an ugly or evil-looking old woman." But this, considering the source, may be considered a compliment. For the beauty of strong, creative women is "ugly" by misogynistic standards of "beauty." The look of female-identified women is "evil" to those who fear us. As for "old": ageism is a feature of phallic society. For women who have transvaluated this, a Crone is one who should be an example of strength, courage and wisdom.

For women who are on the journey of radical be-ing, the lives of the witches, of the Great Hags of our hidden history are deeply intertwined with our own process. As we write/live our own story, we are uncovering their history, creating Hag-ography and Hag-ology. Unlike the "saints" of christianity, who must, by definition, be dead, Hags live. Women traveling into feminist time-space are creating Hag-ocracy, the place we govern. To govern is to steer, to pilot. We are learning individually and together to pilot the time-spaceships of our voyage. The vehicles of our voyage may be any creative enterprises that further women's process. The point is that they should be governed by the Witch within--the Hag within.

In living/writing Hag-ography it is important to recognize that those who live in the tradition of the Great Hags will become haggard. But this term, like so many others, must be understood in its radical sense. Although *haggard* is commonly used to describe one who has a worn or emaciated appearance, this was not its original or primary meaning. Applied to a hawk, it means "untamed." So-called obsolete meanings given in Merriam-Webster include "intractable," "willful," "wanton," and "unchaste." The second meaning is "wild in appearance, as a) of the eyes: wild and staring b) of a person: WILD-EYED." Only after these meanings do we find the idea of "a worn or emaciated appearance." As a noun, *haggard* has an "obsolete" meaning: "an intractable person, especially: a woman reluctant to yield to wooing."

Haggard writing is by and for haggard women, those who are intractable, willful, wanton, unchaste, and especially, those who are reluctant to yield to wooing. It belongs to the tradition of those who refuse to assume the woes of wooed women, who cast off these woes as unwor-

[†]*Nightmare*, is said to be derived from the Middle English terms *night* plus *mare*, meaning spirit. The first definition given in Merriam-Webster is "an evil spirit formerly thought to oppress people during sleep." Another definition is "a hag sometimes believed to be accompanied by nine attendant spirits." For Hags this should be a friendly gathering.

thy of Hags, of Harpies. Haggard women are not man-wooded. As Furies, women in the tradition of the Great Hags reject the curse of compromise.

The Great Hags of history, when their lives have not been prematurely terminated, have lived to be Crones. Crones are the long-lasting ones.† They are the Survivors of the perpetual witch-craze of patriarchy, the Survivors of the Burning Times.‡ In living/writing, feminists are recording and creating the history of Crones. As Denise Connors has suggested, women who can identify with the Great Crones may wish to call our writing of women's history Crone-ography.

It is also appropriate to think of our writing in this tradition as Crone-ology. *Chronology*, generally speaking, means an arrangement (as of data, events) in order of time of occurrence or appearance. In a specific sense, however, it refers to "the classification of archeological sites or prehistoric periods of culture." Since the history of Hags and Crones is truly Prehistoric in relation to patriarchal history--being prior both in time and in importance--haggard women should consider that our Crone-ology is indeed our chronology. In writing/recording/creating Crone-ography and in studying our own Prehistoric chronology, we are unmasking deceptive patriarchal history, rendering it obsolete. Women who refuse to be wooed by patriarchal scholarship can conjure the chronicles of the Great Crones, foresisters of our present and future Selves. In Greek mythology, the crow is an oracular bird. Whether or not an etymological connection can be demonstrated, the association between Crones and oracular utterances is natural and obvious. As un-wooded women unearth more of our tradition, we can begin to hear and understand our own oracles, which have been caricatured as the "screeching" of "old crows."

A Spinster, of course, is a woman who spins. This is its primary definition. To spin has many meanings, you know. All great Goddesses spin and weave. To spin, to whirl and twirl, to reverse, to spin on one's heel, to turn everything upside down--so we don't always have to look for brand new words: this is creation.

One night I sort of went into a trance and was thinking about dis-possession as we move more into territory and terrain of Hags, Crones, Harpies, Spinsters, Witches. In the State of Possession, what happens? Under the appearance of bonding there is binding. The mothers bind the feet and minds of daughters. The daughter is turned against the mother, the pseudo-sister is the re-sister of her Sister, standing against her. As

†The status of Crones is not determined merely by chronological age, but by Crone-logical considerations. A woman becomes a Crone as a result of Surviving early stages of the Otherworld Journey and therefore having discovered depths of courage, strength, and wisdom in her Self.

‡*The Burning Times* is a Crone-logical term which refers not only to the period of the European witchcraze (the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries) but to the perpetual witchcraze which is the entire period of patriarchal rule.

her re-sister she is a reversed imitation, a mirror image, her "life-like" reproduction. She covers and re-covers the Sister until she can no longer find her Self, having forgotten to search for her Self. Trapped into re-searching she finds only the re-sister.

In order truly to search for the Sister it is necessary to see the dis-membered Sister within, the Sister Self, and to re-member her, coming into touch with the original intuition of integrity. Once mindful of the Sister, the Self need no longer resist her, her mind is full of her. She IS her. She is her Self. Re-membering is the remedy. The reign of healing is within the Self, within the Selves seen by the Self and seeing the Self. The remedy is not to turn back but to become in a healing environment, the Self, and to become the healing environment.

In this space the Self is not re-ligious, not tied back by old ligatures, old allegiances. She pledges allegiance to no flag, no cross. She sees through the lies of alleged allies. She re-veres no one, for she is free-ing her Self from fears. This space, the Self's holy environment, is the opposite of the re-recovery rooms of the unnatural physicians of soul and body. It is dis-covery room.

In our dis-covery room our Selves dis-cover room, re-versing the refrains that have framed our know-ing into "knowledge." No need here to stay in the hearses the false physicians have made of our bodies, our minds, when they made us re-hearse each reversed truth, boxing them into coffins of deception, our false selves. No need to repeat the refrains of the rituals that restrain our Selves, that strain our Selves.

The rulers of patriarchy--males with power--wage an unceasing war against life itself. Since female energy is essentially biophilic, the female spirit/body is the primary target in this perpetual war of aggression against life. Gyn/Ecology is the re-claiming of life-loving female energy. This claiming of gynergy requires knowing/naming the fact that the State of Patriarchy is the State of War, in which periods of recuperation from and preparation for battle are euphemistically called "peace." Furies/Amazons must know the nature and conditions of this State in order to dis-cover and create radical female friendship. Given the fact that we are struggling to emerge from an estranged State, we must understand that the Female Self is The Enemy under fire from the guns of patriarchy. We must struggle to dis-cover this Self as Friend to all that is truly female, igniting the fire of female friendship.

It is Crone-logically important to re-call that the word *friend* is derived from an Old English term meaning to love, and that it is akin in its roots to an Old English word meaning free. The radical friendship of Hags means loving our own freedom, loving/encouraging the freedom of the other, the friend, and therefore *loving freely*. To those who might object that the word *friend* is an "old word," Crones who know what radical female friendship is can reply that it is indeed an Old Word and that we are re-calling it, re-claiming it as our heritage. The identity named by the Old Word *friend* is from our own Background. It names our Presence to each other on the Journey. It cannot be experienced by those who are

under the spell of the Preprocessors. Nor can it be experienced by those who feel the need to prepossess others, for this need is evidence of inability to be radically alone, and thus of inability to be a friend. It is this lack that is hidden by the fraudulent claims of patriarchal males who name themselves The Proprietors of friendship itself, who propagate the Lie that "only men can be friends."

Women finding and creating deep bonds with each other seek to use the contaminated words of our patriarchal false heritage to express these. Women finding each other speak of sisters, friends, lovers. Yet the words often mysteriously bend back upon themselves, forming boomerangs rather than instruments for expression of bonding. Since the terms are all polluted with patriarchal associations, they function not only as means of expression, but also as mind pollutants.

Women breaking away from the feminine condition often tend at first to imitate male comradeship, initially misperceiving sisterhood as something like the female equivalent of brotherhood. However, Crones who have persisted in the Otherworld Journey have come to know deeply that sisterhood, like female friendship, has at its core the affirmation of freedom. Thus sisterhood differs radically from male comradeship/brotherhood, which functions to perpetuate the State of War.

Since sisterhood is deeply like female friendship, rather than being its opposite (as in the case of male semantic counterparts) it is radically Self-affirming. In this respect it is totally different from male comradeship/brotherhood, in which individuals seek to lose their identity. The difference between sisterhood and male comradeship, which is disguised by an apparent similarity of terms, would be almost impossible to exaggerate. An important clue to the essence of this difference is the fact that the epitome of male bonding in comradeship is experienced in war.

Since Sisterhood is the expression of biophilic energy burning through the encasements of the Necrophilic State of Staledom, it is more complex than mere male monogender merging. Since Bonding Furies are not primarily concerned with fighting, but with breaking boundaries, bounding free, our ecstasy is totally other than "war ecstasy." However, Crones also know that since the Female Self, who is Friend to her Self, is The Enemy of patriarchy, the bonding of our Selves is perceived by the warriors as the Ultimate Threat to be shot down with every big gun available. Given such conditions, besieged Furies *do* fight back, and thus there is a warrior element in Sisterhood. There is, then, an element in Haggard bonding which is "us versus a third," and which is Positively Furious. Yet Crones know that this warrior aspect of Amazon bonding becomes truly dreadless daring only when it is focused beyond fighting. Our inherited vocabulary is inadequate to express this complexity and its inherent priorities, since it has been dwarfed to accommodate the pale male experience of bonding.

In order to overcome this inherited vocabulary of idiotology, Hags/Harpies must use our Double Axes to hack away its false dichotomies, particularly the demonic opposition between Sister and Friend. For it is the Friend in the Sister who defines/limits/expands her

role as warrior. It is the Free Friend who has no need to be consumed in the "fire of communal ecstasy," to melt/meld in mass murder/mergers. It is the Friend/Self who can define sisterhood as Other than brotherhood, who can aim the fire of Fury so that it transcends the state of enmity. It is she who can blaze the trails that will lead Journeymen away from the battleground, into the Background.

Far from being opposites, then, sisterhood and female friendship are not clearly distinct. A feminist thinks of her close friends as sisters, but she knows that she has many sisters--women extremely close in their temperaments, vision, commitment--whom she has never met. Sometimes she meets such women and some conversation unmasks the similarities between them. She may have an uncanny feeling that she has known these women for years, that the present conversation is merely one in a series of many with these women. The proximity that she feels is not merely geographic/spatial. It is psychic, spiritual, in the realm of inner life-time. She senses gynaesthetically, that there is a convergence of personal histories, of wave-lengths. She knows that there is a network of communication present, and that on some level, at least potentially, it exists among women who have never met or heard of each other. Because of limitations of energy, time, space, these women are not actually her friends, but they are sisters, potential friends.

Male-defined erotic love involves loss of identity and is inherently transitory. It involves hierarchies, ranking roles--like the military--on the model of S and M. While male erotic love is seen as similar to comradeship in these respects, it is experienced as weaker in intensity and depth. Woman-loving Spinsters/Lesbians who are finding integrity of gynaesthetic experience know that such splitting of erotic love from friendship and likening it to warrior-comradeship is symptomatic of the disease of fragmentation. This is the diseased State of Fraternity, and the well-being of sisterhood requires understanding that radically Lesbian loving is totally Other from this. For female-identified erotic love is not dichotomized from radical female friendship, but rather is one important expression/manifestation of friendship.

I would like to briefly wind up (unwind) by speaking of invitations to assimilation. Just coming to this convention was a terrible shocker. I crawled up into bed for a half hour and went into a sort of coma after being on the elevators with male academics and their chosen tokens. In case there is any doubt that sisterhood is unlike male merging, just get on the elevators of the hotels which "host" these conventions. Hags also should *hear* the "authorities." D.H. Lawrence in an essay on Whitman expresses the patriarchal poetic vision of fulfillment: "Woman is inadequate for the last merging. So the next step is the merging of man-for-man love. And this is on the brink of death. It slides over into death." Grateful for our "inadequacy," Amazons/Lesbians strive to step aside while the death-loving Mergers slide over the brink.

Women loving women do not seek to lose our identity, but to express it, dis-cover it, create it. A Spinster/Lesbian can be and often is a deeply loving friend to another woman without being her "lover," but it is impossible to be female-identified lovers without being friends and sisters.

The Presence of Enspiriting Female Selves to each other is a creative gynergetic flow that may assume different shapes and colors. The sparking of ideas and the flaming of physical passion emerge from the same source. The bonding of woman-loving women survives its transformations because its source is the Sister-Self. It survives because the very meaning of this bonding is Surviving, that is, Super-living. It is biophilic bonding.

NOTE: This talk contains sections from *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* by Mary Daly; copyright ©1978 by Mary Daly, printed by permission of Beacon Press, Boston. *Gyn/Ecology* will be published by Beacon in the fall of 1978.

Audre Lorde:

I would like to preface my remarks on the transformation of silence into language and action with a poem. The title of it is "A Song for Many Movements" and this reading is dedicated to Winnie Mandala. Winnie Mandala is a South African freedom fighter who is in exile now somewhere in South Africa. She had been in prison and had been released and was picked up again after she spoke out against the recent jailing of black school children who were singing freedom songs, and who were charged with public violence... "A Song for Many Movements":

Nobody wants to die on the way
caught between ghosts of whiteness
and the real water
none of us wanted to leave
our bones
on the way to salvation
three planets to the left
a century of light years ago
our spices are separate and particular
but our skins sing in complimentary keys
at a quarter to eight mean time
we were telling the same stories
over and over and over.

Broken down gods survive
in the crevasses and mudpots
of every beleaguered city
where it is obvious
there are too many bodies
to cart to the ovens
or gallows
and our uses have become
more important than our silence
after the fall

too many empty cases
of blood to bury or burn
there will be no body left
to listen
and our labor
has become more important
than our silence.

Our labor has become
more important
than our silence.

(from Audre Lorde's *The Black Unicorn*, W.W. Norton & Co., 1978)

In listening to Mary I was struck by how many of the same words seem to come up. They did in her paper, and I know that they do in mine, words such as *war*, *separation*, *fear*, and the ways in which those words are intimately connected with our battlings against silence, and the distortions silence commits upon us. I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect. I am standing here as a black lesbian poet, and the meaning of all that waits upon the fact that I am still alive, and might not have been. Less than two months ago, I was told by two doctors, one female and one male, that I would have to have breast surgery, and that there was a 60 to 80 percent chance that the tumor was malignant. Between that telling and the actual surgery, there was a three week period of the agony of an involuntary reorganization of my entire life. The surgery was completed, and the growth was benign.

But within those three weeks, I was forced to look upon myself and my living with a harsh and urgent clarity that has left me still shaken but much stronger. This is a situation faced by many women, by some of you here today. Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action.

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and by what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change, or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength.

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living.

The women who sustained me through that period were black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, and we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence. They all gave me a strength and concern without which I could not have survived intact. Within those weeks of acute fear came the knowledge--within the war we are all waging with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not, I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself, a black woman warrior poet doing my work, come to ask you, are you doing yours?

And, of course, I am afraid--you can hear it in my voice--because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, "Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth."

In the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of her own fear--fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the very visibility without which we also cannot truly live. Within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism. Even within the women's movement, we have had to fight and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson--that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters

and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still will be no less afraid.

In my house this year we are celebrating the feast of Kwanza, the African-American festival of harvest which begins the day after Christmas and lasts for seven days. There are seven principles of Kwanza, one for each day. The first principle is Umoja, which means unity, the decision to strive for and maintain unity in self and community. The principle for yesterday, the second day, was Kujichagulia--self-determination--the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined and spoken for by others. Today is the third day of Kwanza, and the principle for today is Ujima--collective work and responsibility--the decision to build and maintain ourselves and our communities together and to recognize and solve our problems together.

Each one of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation, and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.

For those of us who write, to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

And it is never without fear; of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now, that if I were to have been born mute, and had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own: for instance, "I can't possibly teach black women's writings--their experience is so different from mine," yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? Or another: "She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?" Or "She's a lesbian, what would my husband say, or my chairman?" Or again, "This woman writes of her sons and I have no children." And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak now these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

Judith McDaniel:

Many of us--especially on this panel--have talked about silences in our lives and in our writing.

And we have talked about the power of naming--naming ourselves as women, as lesbians, the need to claim certain words (or names) for our own use. In all of this is a recognition of the power of words to create a larger reality.

For two years now I have been thinking about these things with regard to women's given names. I wrote a poem about the grandmother I was named after, a grandmother who died long before I was born, died of a self-induced abortion, an admission that the circumstances of her life were no longer tolerable to her. And in that poem, "For My Mother's Mother," I consider my own identification with the woman who was my namesake and what the story of her life and death means to me.

More recently the death of a close friend, who was named Ruth, sent me in reflection to the old testament story of Ruth--as if I could find in the telling of one life satisfaction for the loss of another.

And I read with fascination of Ruth who married the son of Naomi and when he died and Naomi urged Ruth to return to her own people, Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi, saying to her--surely with great love--"whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge...where thou diest, will I die and there will I be buried." And I read on, waiting for some account of their life together--not waiting, actually, for I already knew the story, but needing, expecting through that need more than I would find--for as we all know, Ruth works in the fields of a wealthy man and sleeps at his feet at night to keep them warm; and he marries her and she gives birth to a son who is to be the grandfather of David.

What struck me most profoundly--finally--about this story was its silences. Where can we hear or learn:

What satisfaction did Ruth and Naomi find in their life together?

What was Ruth thinking as she lay on the cold hard floor wrapped around that man's feet?

Did it mean anything to her that she was the great grandmother of King David?

How did she love Naomi?

When she died, did she feel her life had been a full and happy one? The old stories--the stories that name us and tell us how we can live our lives--the old stories are filled with such silences.

And yes, we can and are rewriting these stories, lesbians are rewriting them. I know now there are other possibilities for the life Ruth and Naomi might have had together--and those possibilities will become realities.

But self-defining, I believe, is more than renaming. To break the silence, particularly the silence around lesbianism, ultimately means to have access to a part of ourselves that is not conscious, access to an inner reality that defines and limits us. It is a part of ourselves that has incorporated the old stories and it lies beyond our conscious will.

How do we change this inner censor? or how is it changed? For change it we must. And this necessity seems to me more and more urgent. We know the oppressor out there--we each know the identity of the rich man in whose fields we toil and what we pay to him for our survival. But to know the limitations that come from within us, that seems to me an even more difficult task. For first we must conceptualize it and then we must speak it aloud.

One primitive method of conceptualization for me has been my dream life. If I am very careful and if I listen, sometimes I have access to that unconscious self. Some of these dreams are funny--like the night I awoke saying to myself, "Oh my god, vagina dentata, what next?"--and some are nightmares, which as I wake I dream over and over and seem to be trying through the dream to impose a more conscious control of my roles. Some of the dreams perplex, but give me a conceptualization I had not had before. For example, I once dreamed that I was reading a book, a large old manuscript with parchment-like pages. And as I turned the pages a warrior goddess sprang out from between them. She was dressed in ancient armour and so was I, I noticed with no surprise whatever. We faced each other and prepared to fight, never asking why or what about, it seemed enough that we were warriors. Much clashing of swords and then this: she stood behind me and released a dozen snakes that went in my skull. I became passive immediately, felt my skill and intelligence ooze away. I grew smaller, infantile.

Then I was myself, leading this creature who had been me along a path in a deep woods. As we walked, occasionally we passed people who would comment on it; strange animals came out of the bushes to sniff it. As evening came I knew that I was going to have to defend it and climbed into the ruin of a large old building. I fought for a long time to keep it safe, but finally I was exhausted and the animals who were attacking came closer and closer. And then I saw it. As it stood behind me I realized it glowed in the dark. I knew this meant it was poison. It moved forward toward the attacking animals and they shrank away. I knew the poison was its protection and it would be ok and I didn't have to fight for it any more.

But what is conceptualized here, we ask. Surely not a literal self-image. I do not conceive that self as a two foot tall pudgy little thing that glows in the dark and is poison.

But the dream tells me something about defiance, about which battles need to be faced and which are already won if we only look at them.

And it tells me something about the essence of what we are as feminists--and especially as lesbians--that is seen by those who would destroy us as a threat, poison, and in that threat is our defense; and, yes, at the same time that which antagonizes. For by being what we are, by speaking aloud, we come immediately into confrontation with the world around us. Certain things--if imagined and then spoken--deny us access to approved roles within our social sphere. As a self-spoken lesbian, I will never again be the same "good girl" I was when the approval of the fathers was possible for me; whether in my personal life or my professional and political lives.

Which brings me to a basic disagreement with the title of this panel--I can't talk about language and action in separate modes. Language for me is action. To speak words that have been unspoken, to imagine that which is unimaginable, is to create the place in which change (action) occurs. I do believe our acts are limited--ultimately--only by what we fail or succeed in conceptualizing. To imagine a changed universe will not cause it to come into being, that is a more complex affair; but to fail to imagine it, the consequences of that are clear.

If feminism is the final cause--and I believe it is--then language is the first necessity.

Adrienne Rich:

Many of the ideas in what follows belong to a continuing, non-linear, meditation and colloquy. For me, it began when I first heard Tillie Olsen, at the Chicago MLA in 1971, speak of the forces that have stifled and muted women writers, and when in 1972 I first read Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*, in which she identified the "Great Silence" which has buried or erased the history and creations of women. It has gone on in private and public places; on paper and over the long distance telephone; as I listened to tapes of Judith McDaniel, Susan Griffin and Sandy Boucher speaking on Lesbian literature at the San Francisco MLA in 1975; as I read in lavender ditto versions Julia Stanley's and Susan Robbins' papers on the politics of grammar and naming; as I read Deena Metzger on secrets, Alice Walker on the lost, illiterate black women artists, Michelle Cliff on speechlessness; as I have talked with old friends and with women newly met, as I have tried to probe the nature of my own life's silences in journals, poems and dreams.¹ So everything I say here has been touched in some way by other women writers, thinkers, teachers and students, without whose work my own would be impoverished.

I would like to speak this afternoon of silence as a crucial element in civilization. Of namelessness, denial, secrets, taboo subjects, erasure, false-naming, non-naming, encoding, omission, veiling, fragmentation and lying. Because time is short, I will be able only to speak these words in your ears, hoping that hearing the forms of silence named will keep us all alert for its presence, aware that it has many presences. Most of all I would like to speak of how the *unspoken*--that which we are forbidden or dread to name and describe--becomes the *unspeakable* (as in the phrase *unspeakable acts*); how the nameless becomes the invisible. And I am going to try to suggest some thoughts to you about the acts of writing and teaching, as a choice between collusion with silence, or revolt against silence.

One of the most recent voices that has entered this meditation and colloquy is that of Barbara Smith, in her essay, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism".² She writes of the interconnections between the violence committed by white racist culture against Black women, the violence committed by homophobic culture--white and Black--against Lesbians, the blotting-out by literature and literary criticism--including that written by Black males and white feminists--of the lives of Black women and most utterly the lives of Black Lesbians. I urge you to find and read this essay, because it addresses eloquently a silence that imprisons all women, white or Black, Lesbian or heterosexual. In other words, I urge each of you to read it *for her own sake*, not for the sake of Black or Lesbian women. We cannot escape collusion with racism or homophobia simply by having "humanistic" intentions, by a desire to be politically liberal, or in the belief that we are in revolt against silence for anyone's sake but our own.

I want to re-examine here, however briefly, the terms "racism" and "homophobia" because they too seem to me in need of redefining, and, in the case of "homophobia", re-naming. The instrumentality of white women in the perpetration of inhumanity against Black people is a fact of history.† So also is the instrumentality of women of the same race against each other, or against our own children: the horizontal and misdirected violence born of a sense of impotence. White women have collaborated actively and passively with racism. Our brains and our affections have been poisoned by its fumes, but there is another tale to be told as well. White women, like Black women and men, have lived from the founding of this country under a constitution drawn up and still interpreted by white men, and in which, until such time as the Equal Rights Amendment is passed, there is still no guarantee to *any* woman of equality of rights under the law. It is important to remember that, despite lack of constitutional citizenship, economic bondage to men, laws and customs forbidding women to speak in public or to disobey fathers,

†I say "Black" and not "Third World" because although separation by skin color is by no means limited to Black and white women, Black women and white women in this country have a special history of polarization as well as of mutual oppression and mutual activism.

husbands and brothers, our white fore-sisters have, in Lillian Smith's words, repeatedly been "disloyal to civilization", and have "smelled death in the word 'segregation'";³ have often defied patriarchy for the first time, not on their own behalf but for the sake of Black men, women and children. In the late '50's and early '60's SCLC and SNCC voter registration projects and freedom schools, white women placed themselves politically and physically on the line; and it can truthfully be said that the late 1960's wave of feminism was propelled, in its most radical form, by women who had learned, in SNCC, "a language to name and describe oppression; a deep belief in freedom, equality and community soon to be translated into 'sisterhood'; a willingness to question and challenge any social institution which failed to meet human needs; and the ability to organize."⁴

I believe that we must recognize and reclaim an anti-racist female tradition, closely entwined though not identical with feminist tradition. This history has been erased, both by Black and white-Leftist documenters of the Black movement, for whom the only "leaders" (with the token exception of Angela Davis) are men; and by white male historians who have erased or trivialized in their texts not only the suffrage and birth control movements and the socialist feminism of the 'twenties and 'thirties, but the activism of women like the Grimke sisters, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Lillian Smith, Fannie Lou Hamer.

But the mutual history of Black and white women in this country is a realm so painful and resonant that it has barely been touched by writers either of political "science" or of imaginative literature. Yet until that silence is broken, that history revealed, we will all be struggling in a state of deprivation and ignorance. It is not that white feminists have simply ignored or discounted the experience, the existence, of Black women, though as Barbara Smith points out, much feminist scholarship has been written as if Black women did not exist, and many a women's studies course or text pays token reference, if any, to Black female experience. A deeper and more insidious problem is that a great deal of white feminist theorizing, where it has dealt with racism at all, has done so laboring under a burden of liberal guilt and false consciousness, the products of a long-inculcated female guilt and self-blame. It is time that we shed this un-useful burden and look freshly at the concepts of racism and responsibility. To understand that we have been, not the creators of racism, but often its instruments, is not to deny or trivialize that instrumentality; it is, perhaps, for the first time, to recognize and resolve to end it.

Women did not create the power relationship between master and slave, nor the mythologies used to justify it, which so strongly resemble the mythologies used to justify the domination of man over woman. Women in revolt against the ideologies of slavery and segregation--two dominant themes of patriarchy--have most often worked from a position of powerlessness, while men in power have called our sense of justice

"emotionalism", dismissing our voices and acts of protest because we have had no collective leverage of our own to bring to the struggles we undertook on behalf of others. And white feminists have too readily tolerated the charge that "white, middle-class women" or "bourgeois white women", are rather despicable creatures of privilege whose oppression is trivial beside the oppression of Black and Third world women. This charge was hurled at the first groupings of the independent feminist movement, a charge of "racism" made in the most obscene ill-faith by middle-class white males against white women fighting for collective autonomy. An analysis that places the burden of racism on white women does not only compound false consciousness: it neglects the profound interconnections between Black and white women from the historical conditions of slavery on; and it does not permit any real examination of the nature of female instrumentality in a system which oppresses all women.

As a Lesbian/feminist my nerves and my flesh as well as my intellect tell me that the connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the most potentially transforming force on the planet. I need to understand more about the connections between Black and white women. I want to know, for instance, about the several thousand Northern white women and Southern Black women who together taught in the schools instituted under Reconstruction by the Freedmen's Bureau, and who together suffered Ku Klux Klan harassment and terrorism, and the hostility of white communities.† I want to understand the dynamics by which many white women allowed themselves to become infantilized by the presence in their homes of Black women as enslaved or underpaid domestic workers--who mothered and "coped" for them; how the Black woman and the white woman have become mythologized in each others' consciousness not simply through class but through the sexual divisions created by the white male psyche, including its perverse ideas of beauty. How have white women projected our own sexuality, our own feelings of deviance, onto Black women, not to speak of our own rage? What illusions of the other's Amazonism or incompetence, glamor or disability, sexuality or sexlessness, still imprint our psyches, and where did we receive these impressions? How did the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's explode the long-dormant reservoirs of intensity between Black and white women? How has the Black man, how has the white man, gained from polarizing the "white bitch" and the "nigger cunt"? Why have questions like these remained *unspeakable*?

†Nancy Hoffman, of the University of Massachusetts, Boston, and a long-time activist in women's studies, has recently sent me a paper based on her extensive research on the "Yankee schoolmarms" of the Civil War South.

In her *Conditions* article, Barbara Smith says that she would like "to encourage in white women a sane accountability to all the women who live and write on this soil." Speaking as a white Lesbian/feminist, I would add that for this accountability to be truly sane, it cannot be nourished by guilt, nor by "correct politics" nor by the false consciousness born of powerless responsibility; nor can it be felt as an accountability to some shadowy "other", the Black Woman, the myth. It cannot, above all, be founded in ignorance. If we begin to recognize what the separation of Black and white women means, it must become clear that it means separation from ourselves. Breaking silence about our past means breaking silence about what the politics of skin color, of white and Black male mythology and sexual politics, have meant to us, and listening closely as Black women tell us what it has meant for them. Why should we feel more alien to the literature and lives of Black women than to centuries of the writings and experience of white men? Which of these two cultures is most truly significant to us as we struggle to build a female vision? And what, for a feminist, can passive racism mean but that we passively consent to remain the instruments of men, who have always profited from colonialism, imperialism, slavery, enforced heterosexuality and motherhood, organized prostitution and pornography, and the separation of women from each other?

The past ten years of feminist writing and speaking, saying our own words or attempting to, have shown us that it is the realities civilization tells us are regressive or unspeakable which prove our deepest resources. Female anger. Love between women. The tragic, potent bond between mother and daughter. The fact that a woman may rejoice in creating with her brain and not with her uterus. The actualities of Lesbian motherhood. The sexuality of older women. The connections--painful, oblique and often bitter--between white and Black women, including shame, manipulation, betrayal, contempt, hypocrisy, envy, and love. If we have learned anything in our coming to language out of silence, it is that what has been kept unspoken, therefore *unspeakable*, in us is what is threatening to the patriarchal order in which men control, first women, then all who can be defined and exploited as "other". All silence has a meaning.

And so if we re-examine the term "racism" from a feminist position, we must also take a closer look at the term "homophobia" (meaning the fear of same-gender erotic feelings, in oneself and in others). I suggest that it is an inadequate and misleading term--a form of silence, or false-naming, or veiling--where the fear of Lesbianism is concerned. What all women live

with, what feminists and Lesbians have consciously to confront, is *gynophobia*: the age-old male fear, and hatred, of women, which women too inhale like poisonous fumes, from the air we breathe daily. This is a qualitatively and politically different question from the fear of male homosexuality. The gynophobia directed at all women is more virulently and violently directed at the Lesbian because she is most clearly "disloyal to civilization", in choosing women to be at the center of her life. Women, like Blacks, are seen as needing to be controlled, as embodiments of the "dark" unconscious, inferior in intellectual quality, marginal, guilty victims, dangerous. Violence against women, like violence against Blacks, is rationalized, condoned, and, in the case of women, encouraged by pornography. And so I would like to urge upon all women, Black or white, who are teaching literature, or writing it, or writing about it, an accountability to the Lesbian in themselves, a commitment to hear her and give her space, to speak for her, however stifled she may have become, however faint her voice or blurred her visage. Accountability to Lesbian experience, literature and history is accountability to what has been unspoken and unspeakable. As writers, as scholars, as teachers, we have a choice: to name or not to name. But non-naming is also action: the adding of yet another layer--our own--to the walls that entomb a part of the truth, a part of our freedom.

Silence. Denial. Secrets. Taboo. False-naming. Erasure. Encoding. Omission. Veiling. Non-naming. Fragmentation. Lying. Against this texture or tissue of the unspoken, what wonder if Emily Dickinson exhorted herself to "Tell all the Truth -- but tell it Slant --"; that the words of Phyllis Wheatley that come down to us give us only a ghost of her lifelong pain; or that Gertrude Stein wrote that poetry is "of naming something of really naming that thing by its name" yet that "in *Tender Buttons* and then on and on I struggled with the ridding myself of nouns, I knew nouns must go in poetry as they had gone in prose if anything that is everything was to go on meaning something". If the noun or name for something is *unspeakable* and the writer is committed to her own meaning, she may, as Stein did, adopt desperate strategies. Like Virginia Woolf, she may elaborate in metaphor:

I want you to figure to yourselves a girl sitting with a pen in her hand, which for minutes, and indeed for hours, she never dips into the inkpot. The image that comes to my mind when I think of this girl is the image of a fisherman lying sunk in dreams on the verge of a deep lake with a rod held out over the water. She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depth of our subconscious being. Now came the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men. The line raced through the girl's fingers. Her imagination had rushed away. It had sought the pools, the depths, the dark places where the largest fish slumber. And then there was a smash. There was an explosion. There was foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused

from her dream...*To speak without figure*,‡ [and at last Woolf is able, however briefly, to do so] she had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions, which it was unfitting for her as a woman to say. Men, her reason told her, would be shocked. The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more.⁵

The passage I just read comes from Woolf's speech on "Professions for Women", given before the London/National Society for Women's Service in 1931. Rather, it is the *version* of that speech revised by Leonard Woolf for a posthumous volume of essays, *The Death of the Moth*. If you examine the original version of that essay, in the recently published volume, *The Pargiters*, you discover, among other interesting variations, that Woolf originally wrote "fisherwoman", not "fisherman"; that, as Ellen Hawkes of Boston University has noted,⁶ Leonard Woolf smoothed over and toned-down the "anger and vehemence" with which Woolf flailed at the conventions which circumscribed her and made so much of the woman writer's experience *unspeakable*. This kind of information matters, because it helps us to understand not only Woolf's struggles with her truths, but our own struggles to pierce the silence, the impediments--such as false editing, false criticism, false interpretation and false naming--that we confront as readers and teachers of literature, and as writers even after we are dead.

There is so much to be done. Feminist scholars and theorists still need to examine the question of how institutionalized heterosexuality has served to buttress patriarchy, the control by men of women's minds, bodies and energies. Hetero-feminism is still not feminism in its wholeness, any more than a feminism which engages in passive racism is worthy the name. If in the study and teaching of literature we fail to listen for the silences underlying the poetry of heterosexual romance, if we are not attuned to the gaps in language, the unwritten scenes and absent characters of the novel, the encoded messages in the writing actually before us, we are failing as scholars and educators in the task of bringing-to-light, rescuing from oblivion, exposing both the limits and the untouched possibilities of literature.

I want to end by reading two poems. The first was written by Emily Dickinson at the age of forty-nine, seven years before her death, and eleven years after she had written, "Tell all the Truth --but tell it Slant":

A Counterfeit - a Plated Person -
I would not be -
Whatever strata of Iniquity
My Nature underlie -

[†]italics mine

Truth is good Health - and Safety, and the Sky.
How meagre, what an Exile - is a lie,
And Vocal - when we die.⁷

The second is from a poem by Stephanie Byrd, a 25 year old Black Lesbian poet. I found it in a first volume of her poetry, titled *Twenty-Five Years of Malcontent*.

"Quarter of A Century"

I'll never know my real naming
Never know its origin
What would you call this high yellow
Born into uncertainty and schizophrenia
Born into a place where I have no say
I live with the ghosts of slaves
Whose blood still colours my dreams
What would you call me
me whose name is jigaboo
and nigger
My body aches from unseen beatings
I cry tears of blood
I work tilling a field of my brother's
and sister's
bleeding bodies
And all the while searching for a naming

....

What would you call me
Black woman
Who has sought naming
in strange women's breasts
and between their legs
What is it that you call me
who pays homage to heathen gods
and decorates the family tree
with nightmares
Is there no naming for this child of soil
who stands before you now...

Bones say seek my naming in the East
swollen cracked lips tell me to turn home
grandmothers warn me to turn away the alien ways of
what is white
For when these things are connected
Winding serpentine in hieroglyphs and
language
a name long evasive wanderer and prophet
will be written in the stone⁸

¹Tillie Olsen, "One Out of Twelve" in *Silences* (Delacorte Press, Boston, 1978); Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1973, pp. 92-95); *Sinister Wisdom*, special issue on Lesbian Writing and Publishing, Vol. I #2, Fall 1976, pp. 20-27; Julia P. Stanley, "Sexist Grammar" and "The Prostitute: Paradigmatic Woman"; Julia P. Stanley and Susan Robbins, "Sex-Marked Predicates in English", "Sexist Slang and the Gay Community: Are You One Too?"; Deena Metzger, excerpt from *The Book of Hags* in *Sinister Wisdom*, Vol. I #2; Alice Walker, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" in *Working It Out: 23 Women Writers, Artists, Scholars and Scientists Talk About Their Lives and Work*, ed. by P. Daniels and S. Ruddick (Pantheon Books, 1977); Michelle Cliff, "Notes on Speechlessness" in *Sinister Wisdom*, #5, Winter 1978.

²Barbara Smith, "Toward A Black Feminist Criticism" in *Conditions*, #2; to be reprinted as a pamphlet by Out & Out Books, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1978.

³Lillian Smith, "Autobiography as a Dialogue between King and Corpse" in *The Winner Names the Age: A Collection of Writings by Lillian Smith*, edited by Michelle Cliff, W.W. Norton Co., 1978.

⁴Sarah Evans, "Women's Consciousness and the Southern Black Movement" in "Generations: Women in the South", special issue of *Southern Exposure*, vol. IV, #4, p. 18. See also Cynthia Washington, "We Started from Different Ends of the Spectrum" (same issue).

⁵Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women", in *Collected Essays*, II, pp. 287-288.

⁶Ellen Hawkes, "Will the Real Virginia Woolf Stand Up?" in *Ms.*, January, 1978.

⁷*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. by Thomas Johnson, Harvard University Press, 1955, #1453.

⁸Stephanie Byrd, "Quarter of A Century" in *Twenty-Five Years of Malcontent*, Good Gay Poets Press, Boston, 1976).

CONDITIONS:

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with an emphasis on writing by lesbians*

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"Lesbian/feminist writers are undertaking the hard work of creating a tradition of our own, one which could not have been created before our time. I see **CONDITIONS** as one of the places where this work is being done with seriousness and intelligence. Certainly the poetry in the first issue would be reason enough for subscribing. And to subscribe means to help give continuity to our culture; to nourish that which nourishes us."

—ADRIENNE RICH

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About "Dear Sphinx":

In 1971 the Metropolitan Museum of Art showed "Masterpieces of Fifty Centuries." The Sphinx of Hatshepsut and Kneeling Hatshepsut stood in one of the first rooms of the show, two enormous presences. About that time I read that Hatshepsut had been the first female pharaoh: chosen by her father, at the expense of her brother's life! Her biographers record that her successors did indeed try to obliterate her record of works and monuments. They couldn't.

At the time of the Met show I was very married, very domestically situated, unconsciously besieged, terrified--of him, of change, of the world out there, of myself. The morning after I had seen the show, there was our usual breakfast-time hassle. My alleged "laziness" and "inefficiency" were to blame, as usual, for the chaos getting the five kids off to school, for their not practicing well on their musical instruments, for their rushing through the sullen meal. Next, the standard examination of my insensitivity to embattled lawyer-husband's heroic and Important high-pressure career; then came the question of why I didn't go back to high school teaching, to help support the family and "keep busy." I retreated, as was my custom, upstairs to make beds. Suddenly, while I was bending over my own pillow, the image of those great Sphinx--of that Woman--of that unfamiliar strength--came to me, like Light and lovely thunder; and balm. Leaning on the ironing board, I wrote out the poem *to* Hatshepsut--right *to* her, immediately and wholly. Maybe I wept; I don't remember. It probably took no more than 10 minutes, the poem rushed out so torrentially. One of those miracles: the voice coming, word and rhythm, from so deep inside me, yet as if it had been Given from somewhere else. But it was my voice, and I knew that surely. And I was speaking to a woman, a woman-image, with such love. And I was--ah--beginning at last, at long last, to find the image and standard and voice and expression of myself. I suspect that writing that poem was a turning point: for more clarity and firmness in my work. More understanding--for myself--in my life, leading (much later, many excruciating years later) to more strength and decisiveness in my life. Risks. Ugly domestic violences and violations, causing terrible pain to my children (that's the worst we have to do in making changes: witnessing that I cause immediate pain to "innocent" children is not softened by believing that later, more serious pain will be thus circumvented). Guilt and isolation, innumerable new vulnerabilities to myself. The classic story. The daily common story now. Divorce and fear. Custody fights and bitterness. Financial strains. Nightmares. Years of wear. *But*--from that moment unriddling in my bedroom, when I saw the great symbolic Woman come toward me with Water--a steady straightening up; the cheer of pride; the steady reduction of *shame*...

-Madeline Tiger Bass

NOTE: "Dear Sphinx" will also appear in a forthcoming issue of *Elima*.

Dear Sphinx,

arcane model of my daydreams,
colossal woman! sitting for me,
stone quietude, certain of her
self - eternity,
she winks! (she *never* moves) motionless
in her beard on her lionessness

she winks

and the blue black of all
the world, the museum rooms
turns

red forever dark forever

"truth is beauty"

stone stays to say

yes, the woman lived in power

yes, the woman outlived

pharaohs who followed

to destroy her footsteps footprints

yes, her name was massive

even after erasure yes,

she slept smug in her stone

mountain mountainous yes

Hatshepsut never queen

grew larger yes and after death

more fear of Hatshepsut her self

her head erect her breasts

obliterate- remembered yes her jaw

prepared for silence yes

the men rode humble camels through the desert

sun to crash her monuments!

dust settled smaller cactus broke the bleak sand

sprouting yes the fertile Egypt

yes the martial men in thongs and amulets

with catapults and carved breast-plates

crumbled temples, told milleniums she never

held the knees of Egypt.

Sphinx of man and Lord of all his heavens,

long accustomed regal woman

waits

and smiles no smile-

no effort to deny them. *Lion woman is*

and brings me water in two heavy jugs.

-Madeline Tiger Bass

sentence stress, *n.* *Phon.* the arrangement
of stresses in a sentence.

*Imposition of sentence is hereby suspended. The
Court orders that you be placed on probation for
a period of one year.*¹

I peer into the corners of the
wood paneled

neat clean
courtroom

Searching for the
blood&guts
of the
Viet Nam War

*She has a history of hostility toward law enforcement*²

The judge says *This case is serious*
in my view
because we are a
*government of forms:*¹

I listen to taped conversations
Riding the TimeLine
Between
Then&Now
Caught
in the Past in the Present

*I think we probably should not speak over
these telephones.*³

Well, fuckin' A, I want to talk to you.
Yeah, but we certainly can't do it on this
phone, we have this, this, the problem is,
they have a live tap...

Yeah, I know.
*and is listening to every word we say, uhm...*⁴

The floodgates open
To let back in the 60s
in the 50s

I re-explore connections
Intense
Energy

*people's income tax returns, social security applications, and
applications of all shapes and sizes and descriptions;*¹

IS THIS WHAT YOU THINK IT WAS ALL ABOUT?

The world was on tilt!

I scream inside

I reconnect with myself with others
with our collective memory

and the government in these complex times simply is compelled to rely upon the truthfulness of the responses to questions put in this whole series of forms.¹

HOLY SHIT!

The judge has no clothes on.
He has no sense of history/
or perhaps too much.

FORMS replace VIETNAM
No one mentions VIETNAM
except us/US
and we/WE are on trial

Have you read The Trial by Kafka?
my cousin asks.

Commiejewdykeanarchistwitch
on trial for
crimes against the state
seven years earlier
committed when she was only
the first two
of that five part
person

GABRINER adheres somewhat (degree unknown) to lesbian practices.²

I re-explore connections
Intense
Energy

Informant coverage is always the heart of an investigation of this nature. However, Atlanta's problem is multiplied by the fact that the subjects live in a tightly knit feminist commune and are apparently lesbians.²

The boys can't put it together.
We have some trouble ourselves.

There is a lot of stress in the sentence.
There is a lot of stress
There is a lot of power
in the doing and the living and the remembering and the
connecting and the going on

-Vicki Shanamary Gabriner

Note: I was arrested in May of 1973 on charges of passport fraud and conspiracy to commit passport fraud, stemming from my anti Viet Nam War work with Weatherman in 1970. I was tried, convicted and sentenced in Jan-Feb 1977, and on Susan B. Anthony's birthday of 1978, I won my appeal. In response to pre-trial motions, I listened to conversations illegally taped by the FBI from the national office of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1969-70. Footnotes: ¹Judge's sentencing statement, 2/28/77; ²from FBI files on me, dated 1972-73; ³from transcript of illegal FBI tapes, 1/21/70, 5:08 pm; ⁴from transcript of illegal FBI tapes, 2/6/70, 11:02 pm.

Some Reflections on Separatism and Power

by Marilyn Frye

This piece of writing was done to be presented in the format/situation called "reading a paper" for a meeting of the eastern division of the Society for Women in Philosophy, in December of 1977, in Washington, D.C. The SWIP meeting was held in conjunction with the eastern meetings of the APA (American Philosophical Association)--the audience was not going to be just SWIP women, or even just women. When I sent the manuscript to Catherine and Harriet after the meetings, I sent a covering letter which included the following remark about the paper. "...I expected my audience to be uncomfortable at the least and possibly hostile with/to any defense of separatism. A lot of them aren't lesbians; many are married; all are committed to working in colleges and universities; most of them work more, and more closely, with various male colleagues than I do. So this paper is not addressed to a gang of lesbian feminist man-haters..." It worked out well: I do my best work when I am trying to explain things persuasively to those who are not already persuaded, and most of the women at the meeting seemed to find the product fairly persuasive. (One man told me he found it threatening, which I suppose is a version of persuasive.)

At the meeting, and from readers of the manuscript both before and after the meeting, I received many comments. I've incorporated some, made note of others. I got crucial help from Carolyn Shafer in seeing the structure of it all, in particular, the connections among parasitism and access and definition, which I was seeing only very dimly at first. Loving with Carolyn is a sort of intellectual Vitamin A--helps me have good vision, even in the dark.

I have been trying to write something about separatism almost since my first dawning of feminist consciousness, but it has always been for me somehow a mercurial topic which, when I tried to grasp it, would softly shatter into many other topics like sexuality, man-hating, so-called reverse discrimination, apocalyptic utopianism, and so on. What I have to share with you today is my latest attempt to get to the heart of the matter.

In my life, and within feminism as I understand it, separatism is not a theory or a doctrine, nor a demand for certain specific behaviors on the part of feminists, though it is undeniably connected with lesbianism. Feminism seems to me to be kaleidoscopic--something whose shapes, structures and patterns alter with every turn of feminist creativity; and one element which is present through all the changes is an element of separation. This element has different roles and relations in different turns of the glass--it assumes different meanings, is variously con-

spicuous, variously determined or determining, depending on how the pieces fall and who is the beholder. The theme of separation, in its multitude variations, is there in everything from divorce to exclusive lesbian separatist communities, from shelters for battered women to witch covens, from women's studies programs to women's bars, from expansion of day-care to abortion on demand. The presence of this theme is vigorously obscured, trivialized, mystified and outright denied by many feminist apologists, who seem to find it embarrassing, while it is embraced, explored, expanded and ramified by most of the more inspiring theorists and activists. The theme of separation is noticeably absent or heavily qualified in most of the things I take to be personal solutions and band-aid projects, like legalization of prostitution, liberal marriage contracts, improvement of the treatment of rape victims and affirmative action. It is clear to me in my own case at least, the contrariety of assimilation and separation is one of the main things that guides or determines assessments of various theories, actions and practices as reformist or radical, as going to the root of the thing or being relatively superficial. So my topical question comes to this: What is it about separation, in any or all of its many forms and degrees, that makes it so basic and so sinister, so exciting and so repellent?

Feminist separation is, of course, separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege--this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, *by women*. (Masculist separatism is the partial segregation of women from men and male domains *at the will of men*. This difference is crucial.) The feminist separation can take many forms. Breaking up or avoiding close relationships or working relationships; forbidding someone to enter your house; excluding someone from your company, or from your meeting; withdrawal from participation in some activity or institution, or avoidance of participation; avoidance of communications and influence from certain quarters (not listening to music with sexist lyrics, not watching tv); withholding commitment or support; rejection of or rudeness toward obnoxious individuals.† Some separations are subtle re-alignments of identification, priorities and commitments, or working with agendas which only incidentally coincide with the agendas of the institution one works in.¹ Ceasing to be loyal to something or someone is a separation; and ceasing to love. The feminist's separations are rarely if ever sought or maintained directly as ultimate personal or political ends. The closest we come to that, I think, is the separation which is the instinctive and self-preserving recoil from

†Adrienne Rich: "...makes me question the whole idea of 'courtesy' or 'rudeness'--surely **their** constructs, since women become 'rude' when we ignore or reject male obnoxiousness, while male 'rudeness' is usually punctuated with the 'Haven't you a sense of humor' tactic." Yes; me too. I embrace rudeness; our compulsive/compulsory politeness so often is what coerces us into their "fellowship."

the systematic misogyny that surrounds us.† Generally, the separations are brought about and maintained for the sake of something else like independence, liberty, growth, invention, sisterhood, safety, health, or the practice of novel or heretical customs.² Often the separations in question evolve, unpremeditated, as one goes one's way and finds various persons, institutions, or relationships useless, obstructive or noisome and leaves them aside or behind. Sometimes the separations are consciously planned and cultivated as necessary prerequisites or conditions for getting on with one's business. Sometimes the separations are accomplished or maintained easily, or with a sense of relief, or even joy; sometimes they are accomplished or maintained with difficulty, by dint of constant vigilance, or with anxiety, pain or grief.

Most feminists, probably all, practice some separation from males and male-dominated institutions. A separatist practices separation consciously, systematically, and probably more generally than the others, and advocates thorough and "broad-spectrum" separation as part of the conscious strategy of liberation. And, contrary to the image of the separatist as a cowardly escapist,³ hers is the life and program which inspires the greatest hostility, disparagement, insult and confrontation and generally she is the one against whom economic sanctions operate most conclusively. The penalty for refusing to work with or for men is usually starvation (or, at the very least, doing without medical insurance⁴); and if one's policy of non-cooperation is more subtle, one's livelihood is still constantly on the line, since one is not a loyal partisan, a proper member of the team, or what have you. The penalties for being a lesbian are ostracism, harrassment and job-insecurity or joblessness. The penalty for rejecting men's sexual advances is often rape, and perhaps even more often forfeit of such things as professional or job opportunities. And the separatist lives with the added burden of being assumed by many to be a morally depraved man-hating bigot. But there is a clue here: if you are doing something that is so strictly forbidden by the patriarchs, you must be doing something right.

There is an idea floating around in both feminist and anti-feminist literature to the effect that females and males generally live in a relation of parasitism,⁵ a parasitism of the male on the female...that it is, generally speaking, the strength, energy, inspiration and nurturance of women that keeps men going, and not the strength, aggression, spirituality and hunting of men that keeps women going.

† *Ti-Grace Atkinson: Should give more attention here to our vulnerability to assault and degradation, and to separation as protection.* Okay, but then we have to re-emphasize that it has to be separation at *our* behest--we've had enough of their imposed separation for our "protection." (There's no denying that in my real-life life, protection and maintenance of places for healing are major motives for separation.)

It is sometimes said that the parasitism goes the other way around, that the female is the parasite. But one can conjure the appearance of the female as parasite only if one takes a very narrow view of human living--historically parochial, narrow with respect to class and race, and limited in conception of what are the necessary goods. Generally, the female's contribution to her material support is and always has been substantial; in many times and places it has been independently sufficient. One can and should distinguish between a partial and contingent material dependence created by a certain sort of money economy and class structure, and the nearly ubiquitous spiritual, emotional and material dependence of males on females. Males presently provide, off and on, a portion of the material support of women, within circumstances apparently designed to make it difficult for women to provide them for themselves. But females provide and generally have provided for males the energy and spirit for living; the males are nurtured by the females. And this the males apparently cannot do for themselves, even partially.

The parasitism of males on females is, as I see it, demonstrated by the panic, rage and hysteria generated in so many of them by the thought of being abandoned by women. But it is demonstrated in a way that is perhaps more generally persuasive by both literary and sociological evidence. Evidence cited in Jesse Bernard's work in *The Future of Marriage* and in George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide* and *Men Alone* convincingly shows that males tend in shockingly significant numbers and in alarming degree to fall into mental illness, petty crime, alcoholism, physical infirmity, chronic unemployment, drug addiction and neurosis when deprived of the care and companionship of a female mate, or keeper. (While on the other hand, women without male mates are significantly healthier and happier than women with male mates.) And masculist literature is abundant with indications of male cannibalism, of males deriving essential sustenance from females. Cannibalistic imagery, visual and verbal, is common in pornography: images likening women to food, and sex to eating. And, as documented in Millett's *Sexual Politics* and many other feminist analyses of masculist literature, the theme of men getting high off beating, raping or killing women (or merely bullying them) is common. These interactions with women, or rather, these actions upon women, make men feel good, walk tall, feel refreshed, invigorated. Men are drained and depleted by their living by themselves and with and among other men, and are revived and refreshed, re-created, by going home and being served dinner, changing to clean clothes, having sex with the wife...or by dropping by the apartment of a woman-friend to be served coffee or a drink and stroked in one way or another, or by picking up a prostitute for a quicky or for a dip in favorite sexual escape fantasies, or by raping refugees from their wars (foreign and domestic). The ministrations of women, be they willing or unwilling, free or paid for, are what restore in men the strength, will, and confidence to go on with what they call living.

If it is true that a fundamental aspect of the relations between the sexes is male parasitism, it might help to explain why certain issues are particularly exciting to patriarchal loyalists. For instance, in view of the obvious advantages of easy abortion to population control, to control of welfare rolls, and to ensuring sexual availability of women to men, it is a little surprising that the loyalists are so adamant and riled up in their objection to it. But look...

The fetus lives parasitically. It is a distinct animal surviving off the life (the blood) of another animal creature. It is incapable of surviving on its own resources, of independent nutrition; incapable even of symbiosis. If it is true that males live parasitically upon females, it seems reasonable to suppose that many of them and those loyal to them are in some way sensitive to the parallelism between their situation and that of the fetus. They could easily identify with the fetus. The woman who is free to see the fetus as a parasite† might be free to see the man as a parasite. The woman's willingness to cut off the life-line to one parasite suggests a willingness to cut off the life-line to another parasite. The woman who is capable (legally, psychologically, physically) of decisively, self-interestedly, independently rejecting the one parasite, is capable of rejecting, with the same decisiveness and independence, the like burden of the other parasite. In the eyes of the other parasite, the image of the wholly self-determined abortion, involving not even a ritual submission to male veto power, is the mirror image of death.

Another clue here is that one line of argument against free and easy abortion is the slippery slope argument that if fetuses are to be freely dispensed with, old people will be next. Old people? Why are old people next? And why the great concern for them? Most old people are women, indeed, and patriarchal loyalists are not generally so solicitous of the welfare of any women. Why old people? Because, I think, in the modern patriarchal divisions of labor, old people too are parasites on women. The anti-abortion folks seem not to worry about wife-beating and wife-murder--there is no broad or emotional popular support for stopping these violences. They do not worry about murder and involuntary sterilization in prisons, nor murder in war, nor murder by pollution and industrial accidents. Either these are not real to them or they cannot identify with the victims; but anyway, killing in general is not what they oppose. They worry about the rejection *by women*, *at women's discretion*, of something which lives parasitically on women. I suspect that they fret not because old people are next, but because men are next.

†Caroline Whitbeck: *Cross-cultural evidence suggests it's not the fetus that gets rejected in cultures where abortion is common, it is the role of motherhood, the burden, in particular, of "illegitimacy"; where the institution of illegitimacy does not exist, abortion rates are pretty low.* This suggests to me that the woman's rejection of the fetus is even more directly a rejection of the male and his world than I had thought.

There are other reasons, of course, why patriarchal loyalists should be disturbed about abortion on demand, a major one being that it would be a significant form of female control of reproduction, and at least from certain angles it looks like the progress of patriarchy *is* the progress toward male control of reproduction, starting with possession of wives and continuing through the invention of obstetrics and the technology of extra-uterine gestation. Giving up that control would be giving up patriarchy. But such an objection to abortion is too abstract, and requires too historical a vision, to generate the hysteria there is now in the reaction against abortion. The hysteria is I think to be accounted for more in terms of a much more immediate and personal presentiment of ejection by the woman-womb.⁶

I discuss abortion here because it seems to me to be the most publicly emotional and most physically dramatic ground on which the theme of separation and male parasitism is presently being played out. But there are other locales for this play. For instance,⁷ women with newly raised consciousnesses tend to leave marriages and families, either completely through divorce, or partially, through unavailability of their cooking, housekeeping and sexual services. And women academics tend to become alienated from their colleagues and male mentors and no longer serve as sounding-board, ego booster, editor, mistress or proof-reader. Many awakening women become celibate or lesbian, and the others become a very great deal more choosy about when, where and in what relationships they will have sex with men. And the men affected by these separations generally react with defensive hostility, anxiety, and guilt-tripping, not to mention descents into illogical argument which match and exceed their own most fanciful images of female irrationality. My claim is that they are very afraid because they depend very heavily upon the goods they receive from women, and these separations cut them off from those goods.

Male parasitism means that males *must have access* to women; it is the Patriarchal Imperative. But feminist no-saying is more than a substantial removal (re-direction, re-allocation) of goods and services because Access is one of the faces of Power. Female denial of male access to females substantially cuts off a flow of benefits, but it has also the form and full portent of assumption of power.

Differences of power are always manifested in asymmetrical access. The President of the United States has access to almost everybody for almost anything he might want of them, and almost nobody has access to him. The super-rich have access to almost everybody; almost nobody has access to them. The resources of the employee are available to the boss as the resources of the boss are not to the employee. The parent has unconditional access to the child's room; the child does not have similar access to the parent's room. Students adjust to professors' office hours; professors do not adjust to students' conference hours. The child

is required not to lie; the parent is free to close out the child with lies at her discretion. The slave is unconditionally accessible to the master. Total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access.

All-woman groups, meetings, projects seem to be great things for causing controversy and confrontation. Many women are offended by them; many are afraid to be the one to announce the exclusion of men; it is seen as a device whose use needs much elaborate justification. I think this is because conscious and deliberate exclusion of men by women, from anything, is blatant insubordination, and generates in women fear of punishment and reprisal (fear which is often well-justified). Our own timidity and desire to avoid confrontations generally keeps us from doing very much in the way of all-woman groups and meetings. But when we do, we invariably run into the male champion who challenges our right to do it. Only a small minority of men go crazy when an event is advertised to be for women only--just one man tried to crash our women-only Rape Speak-Out, and only a few hid under the auditorium seats to try to spy on a women-only meeting at a NOW convention in Philadelphia. But these few are onto something their less rabid com-patriots are missing. The woman-only meeting is a fundamental challenge to the structure of power. It is always the privilege of the master to enter the slave's hut. The slave who decides to exclude the master from her hut is declaring herself not a slave. The exclusion of men from the meeting not only deprives them of certain benefits (which they might survive without), it is a controlling of access, hence an assumption of power. It is not only mean, it is arrogant.

It becomes clearer now why there is always an off-putting aura of negativity about separatism--one which offends the feminine pollyanna in us and smacks of the purely defensive to the political theorist in us. It is this: First: When those who control access have made you totally accessible, your first act of taking control must be denying access, or must have denial of access as one of its aspects. This is not because you are charged up with (unfeminine or politically incorrect) negativity; it is because of the logic of the situation. When we start from a position of total accessibility there *must* be an aspect of no-saying, which is the beginning of control, in *every effective* act and strategy, the effective ones being precisely those which *shift power*, i.e., ones which involve manipulation and control of access. Second: Whether or not one says "no," or withholds or closes out or rejects, on this occasion or that, the capacity and ability to say "no," (with effect) is logically necessary to control. When we are in control of access to ourselves there will be some no-saying, and when we are more accustomed to it, when it is more common, an ordinary part of living, it will not seem so prominent, obvious, or strained...we will not strike ourselves or others as being particularly negative. In this aspect of ourselves and our lives, we will strike

ourselves pleasingly, as active beings with momentum of our own, with sufficient shape and structure, with sufficient integrity, to generate friction. Our experience of our no-saying will be an aspect of our experience of our definition.

When our feminist acts or practices have an aspect of separation we are assuming power by controlling access, and simultaneously by undertaking definition. The slave who excludes the master from her hut thereby declares herself *not a slave*. And *definition* is another face of power.

The powerful normally determine what is said and sayable. When the powerful label something or dub it or baptize it, the thing becomes what they call it. When the Secretary of Defense calls something a peace negotiation, for instance, then whatever it is that he called a peace negotiation is an instance of negotiating peace. If the activity in question is the working out of terms of a trade-off of nuclear reactors and territorial redistributions, complete with arrangements for the resulting refugees, that is peacemaking. People laud it, and the negotiators get Noble Piece Prizes for it. On the other hand, when I call a certain speech act a rape, my "calling" it does not make it so. At best, I have to explain and justify and make clear exactly what it is about this speech act which is assaultive in just what way, and then the others acquiesce in saying the act was *like* rape or could figuratively be called a rape. My counter-assault will not be counted a simple case of self-defense. And what I called rejection of parasitism, they call the loss of the womanly virtues of compassion and "caring." And generally, when renegade women call something one thing and patriarchal loyalists call it another, the loyalists get their way.†

†This paragraph and the succeeding one are the passage which has provoked the most substantial questions from women who read the paper. One thing that causes trouble here is that I am talking from a stance or position that is ambiguous--it is located in two different and non-communicating systems of thought-action. *Re* the patriarchy and the English language, there is general usage over which I/we do not have the control that elite males have (with the cooperation of all the ordinary patriarchal loyalists). *Re* the new being and meaning which are being created now by lesbianfeminists, we *do* have semantic authority, and, collectively, can and do define with effect. I think it is only by maintaining our boundaries through controlling concrete access to us that we can enforce on those who are not-us our definitions of ourselves, hence force on them *the fact of our existence* and thence open up the *possibility* of our having semantic authority with them. (I wrote some stuff that's relevant to this in the last section of my paper "Male Chauvinism--A Conceptual Analysis.")⁸ Our unintelligibility to patriarchal loyalists is a source of pride and delight, in some contexts; but if we don't have an effect on their usage, while we continue, willy nilly, to be subject to theirs, being totally unintelligible to them could be fatal. (A friend of mine had a dream where the women were meeting in a cabin at the edge of town, and they had a sort of inspiration through the vision of one of them that they should put a sign on the door which would connect with the patriarchs' meaning-system, for otherwise the men would be too curious/frightened about them and would break the door down to get in. They put a picture of a fish on the door.) Of course, you might say that *being* intelligible to them might be fatal. Well, perhaps it's best to be in a position to make tactical decisions about when and how to be intelligible and unintelligible.

Women generally are not the people who do the defining, and we cannot from our isolation and powerlessness simply commence saying different things than others say and make it stick. There is a humpty-dumpty problem in that. But we are able to arrogate definition to ourselves when we re-pattern access. Assuming control of access, we draw new boundaries and create new roles and relationships. This, though it causes some strain, puzzlement and hostility, is to a fair extent within the scope of individuals and small gangs, as outright verbal redefinition is not, at least in the first instance.

One may see access as coming in two sorts, "natural" and humanly arranged. A grizzly bear has what you might call natural access to the picnic basket of the unarmed human. The access of the boss to the personal services of the secretary is humanly arranged access; the boss exercises institutional power. It looks to me, looking from a certain angle, like institutions *are* humanly designed patterns of access--access to persons and their services. But institutions are artifacts of definition. In the case of intentionally and formally designed institutions, this is very clear, for the relevant definitions are explicitly set forth in by-laws and constitutions, regulations and rules. When one defines the term "president," one defines presidents in terms of what they can do and what is owed them by other offices, and "what they can do" is a matter of their access to the services of others. Similarly, definitions of *dean*, *student*, *judge*, and *cop* set forth patterns of access, and definitions of *writer*, *child*, *owner*, and of course, *husband*, *wife*, and *man* and *girl*. When one changes the pattern of access, one forces new uses of words on those affected. The term 'man' has to shift in meaning when rape is no longer possible. When we take control of sexual access to us, of access to our nurturance and to our reproductive function, access to mothering and sistering, we redefine the word 'woman.' The shift of usage is pressed on others by a change in social reality; it does not await their recognition of our definitional authority.

When women separate (withdraw, break out, re-group, transcend, shove aside, step outside, migrate, say *no*) we are simultaneously controlling access and defining. We are doubly insubordinate, since neither of these is permitted. And access and definition are fundamental ingredients in the alchemy of power, so we are doubly, and radically, insubordinate.

If these, then, are some of the ways in which separation is at the heart of our struggle, it helps to explain why separation is such a hot topic. If there is one thing women are queasy about it is *actually taking power*. As long as one stops just short of that, the patriarchs will for the most part take an indulgent attitude. We are afraid of what will happen to us when we really frighten them. This is not an irrational fear. It is our experience in the movement generally that the defensiveness, nastiness, violence, hostility and irrationality of the reaction to feminism tends to correlate

with the blatancy of the element of separation in the strategy or project which triggers the reaction. The separations involved in women leaving homes, marriages and boyfriends, separations from fetuses, and the separation of lesbianism are all pretty dramatic. That is, they are dramatic and blatant when perceived from within the framework provided by the patriarchal world-view and male parasitism. Matters pertaining to marriage and divorce, lesbianism, and abortion touch individual men (and their sympathizers) because they can feel the relevance of these to themselves--they can feel the threat that they might be next. Hence, heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood, which are the institutions which most obviously and individually maintain female accessibility to males, form the core triad of anti-feminist ideology; and all-woman spaces, all-woman organizations, all-woman meetings, all-woman classes, are outlawed, suppressed, harrassed, ridiculed, and punished, in the name of that other fine and enduring patriarchal institution, Sex Equality.

To some of us these issues can almost seem foreign...strange ones to be occupying center stage. We are busily engaged in what seem to *us* our blatant insubordinations: living our own lives, taking care of ourselves and one another, doing our work, and in particular, telling it as we see it. Still, the original sin is the separation which these presuppose, and it is that, not our art or philosophy, not our speech-making, nor our "sexual acts" (or abstinences), for which we will be persecuted, when worse comes to worst.

¹help from Claudia Card.

²help from Chris Pierce and Sara Ann Ketchum. See "Separatism and Sexual Relationships," forthcoming in *A Philosophical Approach to Women's Liberation*, eds. S. Hill and M. Weinzwieg (Wadsworth).

³answering Claudia

⁴levity due to Carolyn

⁵I first noticed this when reading *Beyond God the Father* (Mary Daly). See also *Women's Evolution* (Evelyn Reed) for rich hints about male cannibalism and male dependence.

⁶Claudia

⁷The instances mentioned are selected for their relevance to the lives of the particular women addressed in this talk. There are many other sorts of instances to be drawn from other sorts of women's lives.

⁸in (improbably enough) *Philosophy and Sex*, eds. Baker & Elliston (Prometheus, 1976).

*With you I have understood
The earth's craving:
The splitting rock
releasing pain
is joy;
Your fingers in me
are putting down their roots.*

*A teacher stands
before the blackboard
holding chalk.
The hands now poised
to write are mine.
Upturned faces
glaze with hope,
expecting words.*

*Blue ink on white pages
dully strewn across the desktop
answer nothing.
I think of the salt spring of you,
Responding.*

*"Lesbian,"
my body whispers.
My life has been a long answer
to a question
no one asked.*

-Susan Robbins

Be Th & Mtg 6-78

RE-MEMBERING
DREAMS
NIGHTS
VISION
PARTNER
SISTERS
NAMING
SISTER'S WHOLENESS
SPEAKING

Nights and Days

The stars will come out over and over
the hyacinths rise like flames
from the windswept turf down the middle of Upper Broadway
where the desolate take the sun
the days will run together and stream into years
as the rivers freeze and burn
and I ask myself and you, which of our visions will claim us
which will we claim
how will we go on living
how will we touch, what will we know
what will we say to each other.

Pictures form and dissolve in my head:
we are walking in a city
you fled, came back to and come back to still
which I saw once through winter frost
years back, before I knew you,
before I knew myself.

We are walking streets you have by heart from childhood
streets you have graven and erased in dreams:
scrolled portals, trees, nineteenth-century statues.
We are holding hands so I can see
everything as you see it
I follow you into your dreams
your past, the places
none of us can explain to anyone.

We are standing in the wind
on an empty beach, the onslaught of the surf
tells me Point Reyes, or maybe some northern
Pacific shoreline neither of us has seen.
In its fine spectral mist our hair
is grey as the sea
someone who saw us far-off would say we were two old women
Norms, perhaps, or sisters of the spray
but our breasts are beginning to sing together
your eyes are on my mouth.

I wake early in the morning
in a bed we have shared for years
lie watching your innocent, sacred sleep
as if for the first time.
We have been together so many nights and days
this day is not unusual.
I walk to an eastern window, pull up the blinds:
the city around us is still
on a clear October morning
wrapped in her indestructible light.

The stars will come out over and over
the hyacinths rise like flames
from the windswept turf down the middle of Upper Broadway
where the desolate take the sun
the days will run together and stream into years
as the rivers freeze and burn
and I ask myself and you, which of our visions will claim us
which will we claim
how will we go on living
how will we touch, what will we know
what will we say to each other.

-Adrienne Rich

(from *The Dream of a Common
Language*, W.W. Norton, 1978)

In which I weep like Niobe
but dry my own tears

by Minnie Bruce Pratt

9/11/75

I will shrivel up like the sauteed onions and squash we ate if I have to sit through another family meal like last night's, with M taping "You don't ever listen to a word I say" into R's rebellious ear and my sitting silent, silent. I feel a coward for not intervening between them as I used to: yet, then, I was the mother-peacemaker, not a fighter against M the father's bullying. I feel a coward for not fighting M on the lesbian mother issue through the streets and into the courtroom in the mother battles like tigress for her children routine: but I already feel I have lost them. In Jo Freeman's *Women: A Feminist Perspective* an essay proclaims "At age 5 boys and girls begin to want to be like their fathers; neither sex wants to be like their mothers." And I think of how my sons will turn away from me soon anyway; R and B will bracket me as 'mother' and have smash-em-up fantasies about me, their own Punch and Judy show. I know now that I cut communication with M because he is male, because he doesn't hear me even when he listens, yet I long to keep a line on two boys who at 5 and 7 are merely pre-pubescent patriarchs. Yesterday the Junior Service League had a "feminist" speaker who justified women's liberation because it would help men and children in the long run: trash from the same receptacle as the Renaissance argument that women should be educated because then we would be better mothers. I slept with S for myself; I work in the Movement for myself and that self in other women, for that female self which was conceived and born in my male children but which dies with every year of their growth toward manhood. Yet I can hardly face toward my own leaving and deliberately leaving them in M's world. I still feel them to be my babies, those selves rolled in the flesh of my womb, even though they were mine for only these few years, or perhaps were never mine.

9/15/75

A dream: the boys and I are swimming in a muddy creek, with sharp currents of warm and cold water, like Schultz creek in my childhood. There are sudden drops and I warn them of the danger. Getting out on the other side, we meet groups of women; we have no place to stay and I feel awkward about asking any of the women for help: social embarrassment on the other side of the Jordan. After the Revolution, what do I do with my boy children?

9/18/75

I spent Tuesday evening with S after a mud and acid bath from M. Being with her in that clear stream of love washed away some of the despair. We listened to Brodsky on tape and made love slowly, my hands slipping down to her knees, my hair rubbing, brushing her hair, kissing her.

Denying all the while his revulsion at my love affair with S, nevertheless M is reworking his icon of the Constant Wife into a caricature of the Crazy Lesbian. When I requested an equal split of debts and cars, he threatened to close the joint checking account, leaving me penniless for three weeks until my first check from school comes. He says, "As the man I'm responsible for the debts; you are being irresponsible." When I refuse to talk to him when he threatens me, he says, "You have to communicate more or I won't let the boys go with you." When I become angry or anxious about arrangements with the children, he says, "You have been acting rather strange, funny, possessed." When I said I didn't believe in this male-headed family for myself or for the children, he sneered, "Then are you going to tell your family, your mother about S?"

9/25/75

I'm down deep, inside a diving-bell of depression. S and I had another fight which she ended by saying that I treated her like M treated me; I was just like a man. My first check from school was cut 30% for taxes, so I don't know if I can leave M before November. But more shaking than doubts about love and money is my fear of the effect of my leaving on the children.

M has finally succeeded in making me feel guilty about something: that I don't care for the children because I haven't talked with him about how to prepare them for the separation. The moment has to come, but I can't stand to cause them pain. What will it be for them, those four nights and days a week when I won't be there? They are already saying, "Will you be here tonight?" or "I don't want M to yell at me about my clothes before school tomorrow; will you be here to dress me?" I feel that I am leaving them without a comforter for their bad dreams, and without a confidant for bad days. I don't see how I can leave, but I have to. It is as logical for me to leave M as it was for me to marry him. I have outgrown dependence on him as I outgrew prayers to a Presbyterian Father. But the very inevitability of being alone is frightening.

10/12/75

My heart is crushed by fury at my lover. After telling the children that, like our stories of the two boys who lived alone in the woods, I was to have a house of my own, I went over to see S. Talking to the children numbed me, with R screaming "no, no" and B adrift in his six-year-old world. We drove over to my house, and they scrambled about for awhile, frantically shoving and pushing drawers, light switches; then they went back to M's to bed. At S's, I told her each comment in babbling detail and, I suppose, irritated her with my obvious distress over them. When I asked her to hold me for a little warmth and said I loved her, I was told, "Don't say those words to me." She is too quick with me now; the pain of the children hurts me so and I need comfort. I am bodiless, headless, heartless with anger and grief; I think for the first time in months, of lying down with M for the warmth of his back: how impossible a comfort.

11/4/75

Since I moved out two weeks ago, and after the NOW convention with S in Philadelphia, I have felt more M's attempt to control me with the children. He has announced that I am to have them at Thanksgiving, but he will probably drive with them to *my* mother's house for Christmas. I indicated, as calmly as I could through a red fog, that if anyone went down with them to Alabama to see *my* mother, I thought that I should. M replied, "Well, you can come, if you want to."

In M's moebius logic, I have forfeited, by my distaste for man's institution of marriage, by my sexual autonomy, by my love for women, any claim for recognition in the eyes of the people who bore and raised me. He becomes the son my mother never had, and I the prodigal daughter, who can only return by the side of her husband. M constantly reproaches me as the outsider, the unnatural one, the abnormal who left, who must adapt to his pattern, to that of the 'family'--but I can drop in anytime I want.

His rage at my sexuality spewed out on Halloween when I went over to treat with the boys and bring them back to spend the weekend with me. I planned to go out later after they were asleep and had dressed up. Noting my velvet coat, M sternly withdrew his permission for their visit; if I was to be so irresponsible and careless of them as to get a sitter, I could not have them over. They were his family and he was responsible for their well-being. To his unctuousness, smooth as baby-fat, I replied, "You are trying to possess the kids; they don't belong to anyone but merely have two parents; you will ruin them by this control, this vampire act." Then the stones fell: "Go fly all over the country with your queer lover if you want to, but shut up and do what I say now or get out and come back when you can talk like a civil person." I refused to go and refused to shut up so he grabbed, shoved, and slammed me into the corner of the kitchen by the stove, which was fortunately not on, and then he threw me out the door onto the cement back porch. During those few

seconds, I screamed thoroughly, and thought: This is very like a scene from 'Woman Under the Influence' and also: I will scream so the boys know that I am being hurt and that M is the one hurting me. And I thought as I hit the cement with my back: He might kill me. However, the knives, for once, had been put away in the utensil drawer.

Furious, I hopped up with my left knee and elbow and right hand bleeding a bit through the black velvet, and jumped back into the kitchen to refuse again to leave. The boys saw all of this and were screaming also. B, standing between me and M, told him to stop and slapped M in the face; R shrank back into the dining area, dazed, clearly seeing that M had won. M, shouting, but in character in his righteous rage, fulfilled the destiny of his stereotypical soul: "You goaded me into this; you are trying to rationalize your leaving me by making me hit you." This male obtuseness still astonishes me: I suppose my stiff elbow and darkening bruises are inventions of my diseased imagination.

11/19/75

I'm inundated with tears and letters, from married friends, from aunts, mother, grandmother. My friends tell me how wonderful their marriages are; my mother can't understand how I can be so selfish as to abandon M and the children; my 96-year-old grandmother prays for my soul and urges a psychiatrist. I don't think I can ever go home and see any of them again.

Re-reading Jill Johnston's "Return of the Amazon Mother," which is right about people's non-acceptance of a mother giving up her children, I have been suffering and grieving for them and for myself, for my not being free of M, for my not having the boys, for the impossibility of honest love, since to be open about my lesbianism would mean that they could be taken from me legally. I loathe having to be careful what and who the children see when they are with me. Last summer I had searing fights with M over whether they would see S; I gave in, when I understood that he wouldn't leave for Harvard, and leave me alone for a month, unless I 'swore' not to 'expose' them to her. Now, terrified about giving him an excuse to refuse them to me altogether, I have to be careful about all my friends. Most of M's literary friends are male and gay but, as M so intelligently puts it, "The children don't see them doing anything illegal," while R and B have actually seen S and me kiss and hold hands.

And now the fear about the children has frozen that lovely, sensuous feeling that I had first for S. She feels that; she is afraid of sex with me. I am too coldly separate, like a dead woman, or too angry, burning up myself and anyone near me.

11/25/75

I had thought I'd gone to the bottom, but last night was mud. Ill and aching with the flu, I called my mother from the Cross Creek pay phone.

She said, "If the family collapses, so does society," in her usual Southern voice of doom, and refused to come see me during Christmas, and refused to forbid M to bring the children down there without me. And refused to acknowledge my pain and ache of betrayal that she, my mother, has chosen to please him, rather than comfort me, her daughter.

I can see the Christmas to come: everyone, O.G., Evie, Lethean, all the aunts, Mama, Grandma, the cousins, Bobby, Jack, Mary, their wives and husbands, all there for sweet potatoes with marshmallows, jello salad, with third generation cousins rolling around, Michael and two Christophers, Laura, R and B. They sympathize with M over his crazy wife, and he moves through the crowded house, more confident of his righteousness, saving the family: mine.

12/17/75

The children are with me while M goes off to Durham; evidently I become normal when he wants me to baby-sit. I'm nervous with R and B, afraid of them, afraid of hurting, not pleasing. R cried as we left daycare because we were to get a Christmas tree for my house; he wanted me and the tree to be in Alabama with them, or wanted to take the tree to M's house. After we decorated, they stayed up late, playing and fighting. I yelled at them, we fell exhausted in bed, all three of us finally, with R holding my hand. What are we all to one another?

12/22/75

Three days ago on B's birthday, he seemed so unlikely an inhabitant of my swollen belly six years ago; B and I made a cake and cut it with M and R. As I left, M toasted me with his bourbon, "It's our ninth anniversary; don't you remember?" A victory of detachment at last: I didn't. He asked plaintively, "Are you coming to Alabama?" Yesterday they drove off in the van crammed with presents.

Since Christmas in Alabama now means to me the convergence of tradition, religion, and emotion around my neck in the smooth collar of matrimonial reconciliation, I called my mother last night from the pay booth down the road and said that I was not coming. Trembling and frozen in the open booth, I heard my mother crying at the other end, B anxious, R angry, M silent.

After the call, I had a winter solstice party, with women, talk, wine, Meg Christian, politics. I watched S and she caught me wanting her, and held my foot. I think I learn from S because she listens to her own self, her body, her ideas, and fights for them; I have ignored mine so now I must listen to my self.

But to hear that self is hard when my mother is whispering, "You must consider others to live. Go back to your family," when I know her ideal of unselfish duty, that martyrdom, is all my past life of Southern consideration, womanly consideration. When my children cry, "You are selfish. Hold us," it is hard to turn from their warm and transient caresses to embrace that steadfast self.

NOTHING SAFE IN CRABTREE MEADOW

When I wake, it is so cold that my cheeks are numb; all around me the night is thickly black under a starless sky. The sound comes again--metal on rock. One of our cook pans is being moved at the fire pit. A marmot, I think, and lie listening. Squirrels and chipmunks aren't big enough to move a pan like that.

Silence.

Then another noise. I listen with strained attention, trying to identify it. *Either* it is the sound of my son Rob unzipping his sleeping bag, *or*--and my scalp tingles--or it is the sound of claws dragging across canvas.

Stealthily, a little at a time, I turn over on the ground inside my sleeping bag until I lie facing Rob. Now in his eighteenth year he is already broadshouldered and sturdily muscled. His big body lies turned away from me. Fast asleep.

There is another scratching noise, loud in the night.

I turn over again, slowly, as quietly as possible, and when I am lying on my right side I unzip the top of my mummy bag and reach a careful hand out into the cold to close it around the flashlight. I direct it at our packs, propped against the log near our feet, and flick the switch.

Looking straight at me in the circle of light are two yellow eyes in a dark furry head. The animal is hunched over from behind the log, his massive forelegs wrapped around my pack.

The light does not frighten him. He goes on ripping at the side pocket of the pack, pulling things out the hole he's made.

My body is paralyzed for a few moments, while my mind leaps back to a conversation with some campers in Junction Meadow. "Make noise," they had advised, "yell. Jump up and down. Beat on pans. Only don't mess with a female bear who has cubs." How can I know the sex of this beast who is pulling a tube of peanut butter from the pocket of the pack, staring me in the eyes all the while?

I desperately want this not to be happening. Oh how I wish this were not happening.

Keeping the flashlight on him, I sit up, unzipping my bag farther, and I start to yell--a karate yell, from the diaphragm, deafening, terrifying. But all that comes out of my tight throat is Eeeeeeeep, eeeeeeeep, eeeeeeeep.

The creature goes on looting my pack. I keep moving backwards as I try to yell, until I'm practically sitting on top of Rob in his sleeping bag. He grumbles and rolls away.

Yellow claws pull a chocolate bar from the frayed hole in the canvas. The small shiny eyes watch me, the enormous furry shoulders hunch tighter around the pack.

I struggle upright out of my warm covering and dance in my thermal underwear on top of my sleeping bag, shouting Hup, hup, hup!

What the hell's wrong with my hardy teenage son? Why doesn't he get up to help me?

I leap and stamp and throw one arm out like a pump handle, my yell getting louder now.

The little eyes watch me warily as the claws pull a bag of trailfood from the hole and stuff it in the mouth, spilling peanuts and sunflower seeds down the front of the pack as the plastic splits.

I jump in the cold air, knees jerking up and down, shouting Yow, yow, yow! I'm afraid to turn away from the bear to find out what Rob is doing.

Out comes a tampax. The animal shoves it in his mouth, bites into it, and one half is left dangling like a cigar butt down his chin.

God *damn* it! Here I am, dancing like a madwoman and screeching not eight feet from him and he just goes on with his midnight snack. "Throw something," they had said in Junction Meadow.

All I have is the flashlight. I pull back my arm, aim, let fly.

It sails toward him and bounces off his head just above his eyes, spiralling up, its beam of light looping crazily in the darkness.

The bear stops all motion, stunned. And in that instant I know I have made a terrible mistake, for something was illuminated by the spinning flashlight beam, something small and furry moving up behind the log. I just glimpsed it. Now I look around for a place to run to. The bear's great body rears up clumsily off the pack, hesitates, and I get ready to go. Anywhere! Up the nearest tree--no. She can scramble up after me. Out through the underbrush in the dark--but surely she can move in it faster than I. The creek is too far down the slope. There is no place to go.

The moment seems endless as she teeters there on her hind legs, her cub shuffling about in the weeds behind her. I understand fully what I've done, now. The knowledge paralyzes me.

And then with astonishing speed she has scrambled over the log and comes thrashing toward me. I turn to run just as she lunges forward on her hind legs. The raging weight of her drags me down, claws tear at my back. I scream and struggle against thick rough fur. She mauls me in the dirt, holds me in a crushing murderous embrace, as the pain rips down my side from my shoulder. Her rank odor curls my nostrils. I see the black sky above her black head, my mind filled with her roaring.

It has been a quiet morning. Earlier the garbage men thumped their way through the basement and out again as their truck grumbled in the street. But I was already awake. I don't sleep as I did before, all night long.

Rob brought me some tea and toast. He stroked my face, he knelt before me and asked me how I am, does my shoulder hurt? can he do anything to make me more comfortable? His darkred curls fall down over his forehead, his eyes are a mottled greenish brown in his sunburned face. I smile at him, wishing he were not so anxious.

On our first night here at home, I asked him to explain. Patiently he told me each of the thoughts that passed through his mind as he lay there almost asleep, each one giving him an excuse not to act or confusing him, until the final moment when he saw the light wobble crazily in the darkness and thought it was a space ship landing, or someone with a flashlight stumbling down upon us. He is goodnatured and big for his eighteen years; he has enormous feet, thick wrists, and a weird science-fiction-filled imagination. My beloved son. Perhaps there would have been nothing he could have done that night. My anger at him passed quickly. Still, he says he feels guilty, and I can see in the tentative way he looks at me that he suffers.

He brings me books and magazines; he describes the movies I could watch on TV. Today there will be "Flying Down to Rio" with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, or maybe I'd like to flip the channel to Bogart and Bacall in "The Big Sleep." A star-filled afternoon. How about it, mom?

It seemed we were caught in a dream as Rob cut away the shreds of my thermal underwear top and bound a T-shirt around my shoulder. Dawn light was arriving. Trees, branches began to appear out of the darkness. I sat propped against the log. I remember how heavy my head felt, hanging down, as I stared at the blood spreading on the white cotton of the T-shirt bandage.

Then there was the ordeal of getting my trousers on, and my boots, for I would not let Rob go off by himself to get help. I would not be left there alone in Crabtree Meadow, wounded and vulnerable. There was a ranger station just at the other end of the meadow. Rob got a belt, put it around my neck and rested my arm in it like a sling. Then he wrapped a jacket around my shoulders and lifted me to my feet. I tottered sideways, grabbing at him with my good arm, as the pain engulfed me in a dizzying wave. He wanted to try to carry me. But I told him I would walk. Just to feel the ground under my feet, to move one leg forward, then the other, kept me connected to consciousness.

When we got to the ranger station, we found it locked and deserted. I remember the padlock hanging on the door, with its little key-shaped mouth.

I sat on the stoop, and it was then I noticed that my whole side from shoulder to knee had turned scarlet. I'm finished, I thought, all my body fluids are leaving me, I'll be dry inside soon, white and weightless. My brain will stop. My heart will go slower and slower until there is no more blood to pump.

A ragged whimpering sound came to me. I looked up to where Rob leaned against the door of the hut, bent forward and shaking. Tears ran down over his dirty hands, making pale crooked tracks in the dust on his skin.

The magazines are piled on the floor next to my chair. I'm not interested in reading. If they'd let me, I'd go back to my job tomorrow. But instead I must stay in this room and receive the guilty ministrations of Rob and the visits of Mrs. Linenthal who comes down from 2B to see me. I'm not even sure Mrs. Linenthal likes me; certainly I've never fulfilled her expectations for someone my age. I am a small woman, and even now in my fifties I am feisty and quick. I don't mean that I seem younger than my age. No, older even, if you look at my face. But I am the person I've become.

Rob says, "I think mom's tired now. She wants to rest." And he leads Mrs. Linenthal out of my room, leaving me alone again.

I know I'm difficult for them to understand. They expect me to need their comfort. But, as I said, I am the person I've become in all these years of living, and what engages me now is the mystery of my actions that night. How, when it seemed I would surely be killed, was I able to get my right arm free, bring up my fist, and hit blindly at the one sensitive and unprotected spot on the animal's body, the nose. And hurt or startled, she staggered away from me and ran into the underbrush, her cub waddling after her.

I hear Rob and Mrs. Linenthal discussing me in the hallway outside my door. Rob is telling her what a difficult patient I am, how the doctor says I should rest more to let my dislocated shoulder set, my wounds heal. Mrs. Linenthal is tsk, tsk'ing.

Their voices are like the voices talking around me, above me, as I was carried out of the back country. Distant, for I was differently connected to life than I am now. The campers who arrived in Crabtree Meadow that morning were two young men and a woman, all about Rob's age. They were carrying enormous packs, and they had tanned legs under loose hiking shorts. While the two men worked with Rob to cut poles and drape a poncho over them to make a stretcher, the woman knelt before me. "Let me give you some water," she said. And she unscrewed the canteen for me and was going to hold it to my mouth until I took it from her with my good hand. When I tilted my head back to drink, I saw a bluejay sitting on a low limb of a tree. The jay cocked its head, regarded me for a few moments, and then began to squawk. I stared helplessly up at it while it screeched insults at me, chiding and complaining. And I thought, I'm done for.

They loaded me carefully on the stretcher, and while one young man ran off to try to locate the ranger, the woman and Rob and the other man carried me out of the meadow on the trail going west. I shut my eyes against the sky's brightness. My body rolled in the poncho, limbs jiggling, until I felt the nausea pressing up out of my stomach. The men's and the woman's voices came--short utterances as they struggled to keep me level on a steep incline, as they waded through a stream. "Careful now." "Protect her shoulder." "Watch out!" Their grunts and strenuous breathing surrounded me.

My stomach roiled as I breathed the stink of bear musk clinging to my skin.

As we encountered each group of hikers on the trail, curious faces appeared above me, staring at me. My rescuers gave hurried explanations. Once a woman leaned over me and laid the palm of her hand for a few moments over my eyes, shielding me. And we went on. Tree branches against sky. Rock walls. My carriers' arms and shoulders. The sound of their boots stumbling on stones. The sun boring through my closed eyelids.

Now here in my room, under the murmured voices of Rob and Mrs. Linenthal trailing off down the hallway toward the outside door, I continue my enquiry. I try to go down the checklist, the way a doctor or an auto mechanic checks off the areas already made sure of. I am a woman. A mother. I have a job. I know how to get on and off buses. The tight soreness of my healing flesh brings me back to myself. I am a human creature of a certain age.

Rob and I were hiking through Sequoia National Forest toward Mt. Whitney in hot dry August.

That evening we had made it to Crabtree Meadow, where we were the only people. The sun was behind the mountain, and a swatch of apricot-colored cloud hung above the ridge in a clear blue sky. All was silent, except for the rush of Whitney Creek below us.

After eating, we propped our packs against a log, spread out the sleeping bags, not bothering with a tent. Normally we would have hung our food supplies high up on a tree limb, but in our eight days of hiking we had seen no sign of bear, and this night we let fatigue overcome our better judgment.

Exhausted and peaceful, we lay in our warm sleeping bags and talked about the last few days, which had been tough ones.

Two nights before, only eighteen miles from Whitney, we had been stopped by a forest fire across the Wallace Creek Trail. Closing my eyes I could see it, burning quietly in the windless night, eating away at the trees and underbrush on the ridge above Junction Meadow where we had been camped. Orange flames crawled the tree trunks, bushes ignited, sizzled, flared up, branches fell, spraying sparks. It burned with a curious sound like paper crumpling.

To get around the fire, we had to go eight miles out of our way up the Tyndall Creek Trail. That day we came up 2,880 feet in eight miles, on short switchbacks up a steep mountainside, with no shade. It was the hardest climb we'd done.

But hiking the next day was glorious. The trees on the slopes up to Bighorn Plateau were yellow pines or sugar pines--dead but still standing, without bark, in twisted spiralled shapes, their wood the color of poured honey.

And then the plateau itself, where we had experienced that great lift to the spirits, the elation of the high country. Eleven thousand feet high and perfectly bare, Bighorn Plateau offered a view of almost 360 degrees. We took off our packs and walked across the wide dome to its center. Furry orange marmots came out of their holes to peer at us, sneak up to examine our packs. We sat on the rocks taking swigs of warmish water from the canteen, looking around us to blue distant peaks. West to the ranges we had come from, north toward Forrester's Pass, and southeast in the direction of Mt. Whitney.

It was delicious to let these pictures move through my mind, as I lay in my mummy bag, the muscles of my legs slowly relaxing, the sound of the creek lulling me. We were safe in Crabtree Meadow, and until morning there was nothing that had to be done.

"I think we'll make it up Mt. Whitney tomorrow, after all," came Rob's drowsy voice from his sleeping bag.

Those words were like a float bobbing on the surface of an ocean into which I sank, farther and farther down, until they with everything else had disappeared and I sank in exhausted, dreamless sleep.

When I woke, it was so cold that my cheeks were numb; all around me the night was thickly black under a starless sky. The sound came again--metal on rock. One of our cook pans was being moved at the fire pit.

And I lay still and thought, this is a dream, the dream is always like this.

Another noise. I listened with strained attention, trying to identify it. Either it was the sound of Rob unzipping his sleeping bag, or--and my scalp tingled--or it was the sound of claws dragging across canvas.

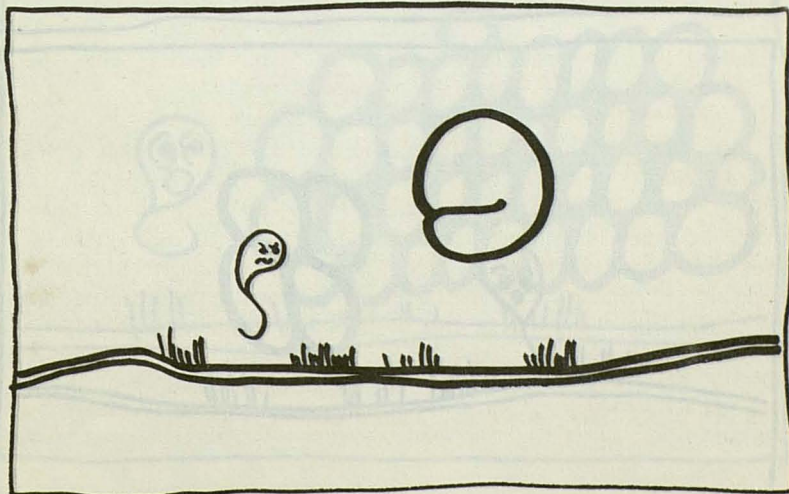
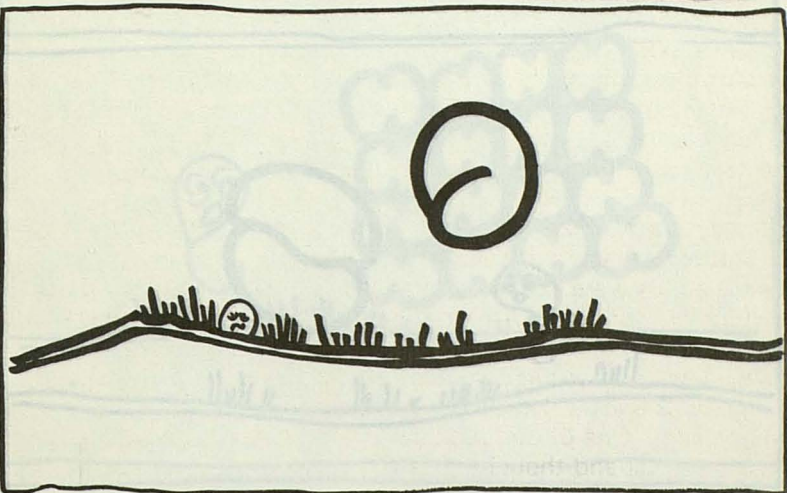
The dream is always like this, right up to that denser bulk of darkness lumbering toward me, engulfing me, pulling me down farther into chaos than I can stand to go, the ground made wet beneath me, my mind falling out the back of my head. Rob cannot enter between us now as I wonder if in the muscles of that animal there is the memory of my body caught against it, whether my odor lingers in her nostrils or has made its trace in her brain. Did she, cleaning herself the next day, lick my blood from between her claws along with the twigs and moss and dried pine needles lodged there?

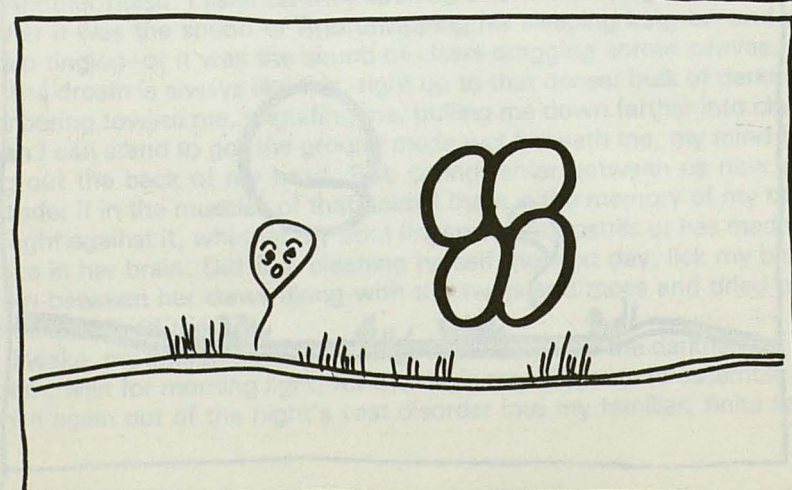
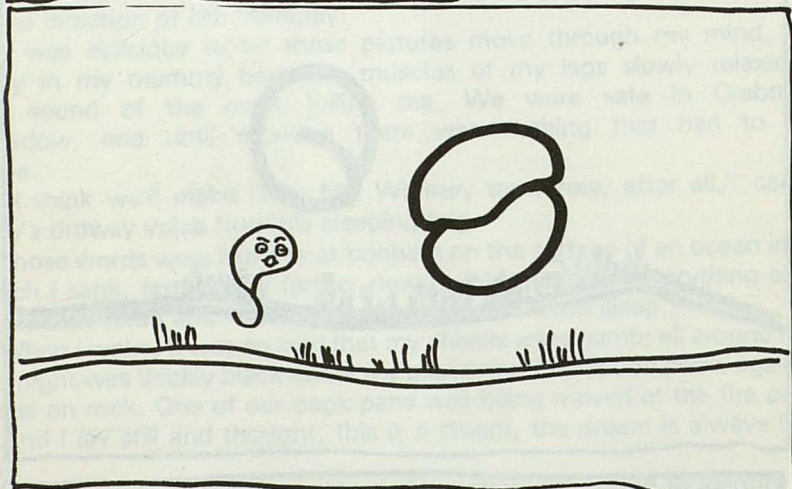
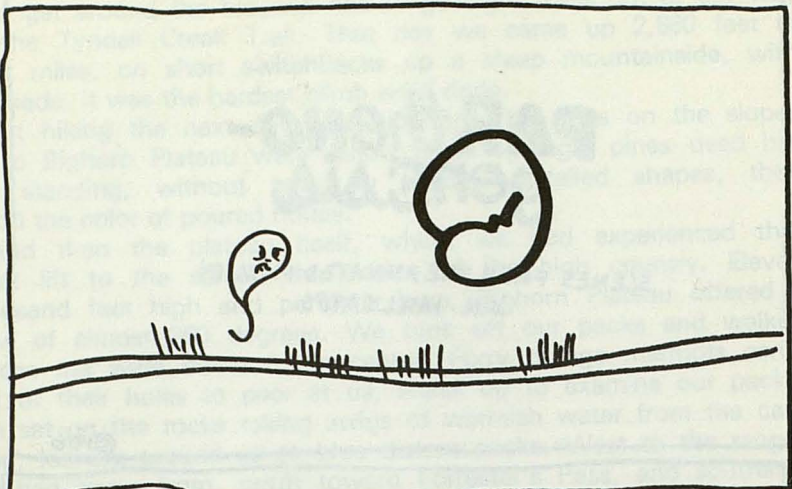
I wake, my injured back throbbing, to stare up into the darkness of my room, wait for morning light, for the day's requirements to assemble me once again out of the night's vast disorder into my familiar, finite self.

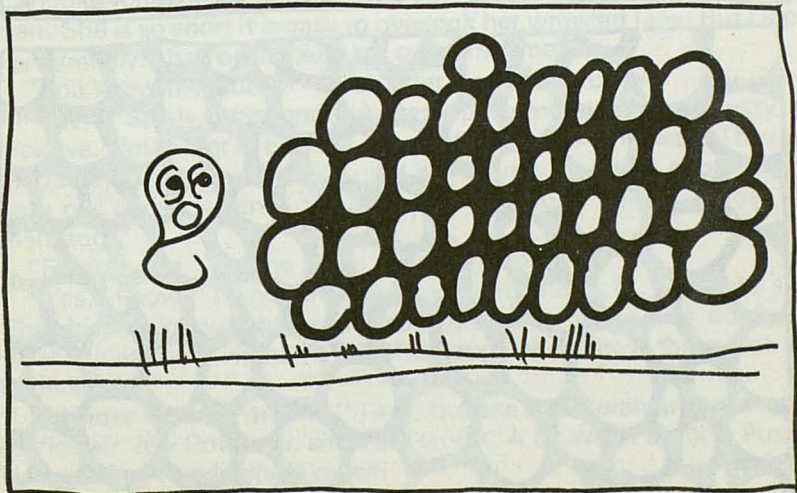
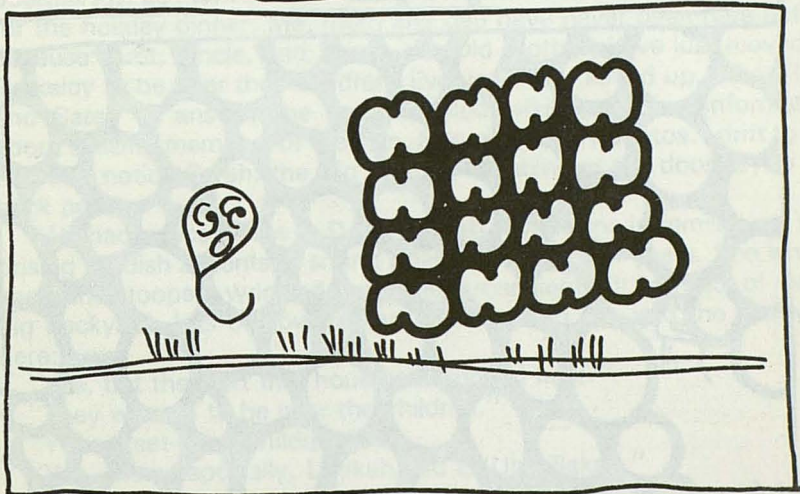
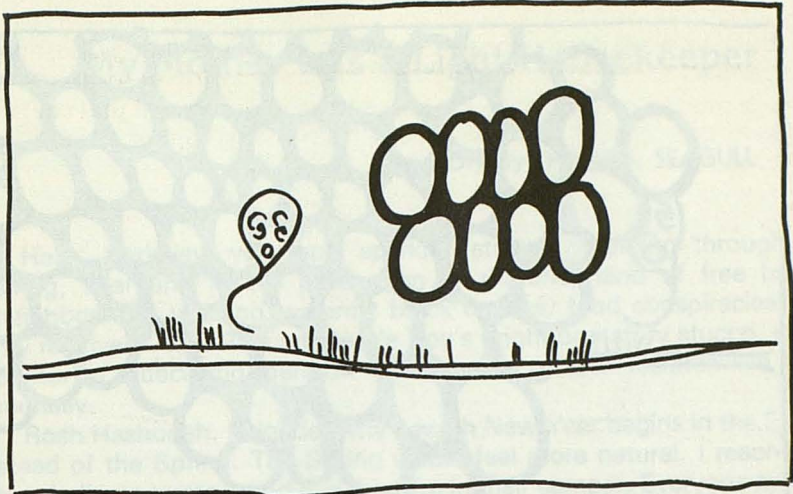
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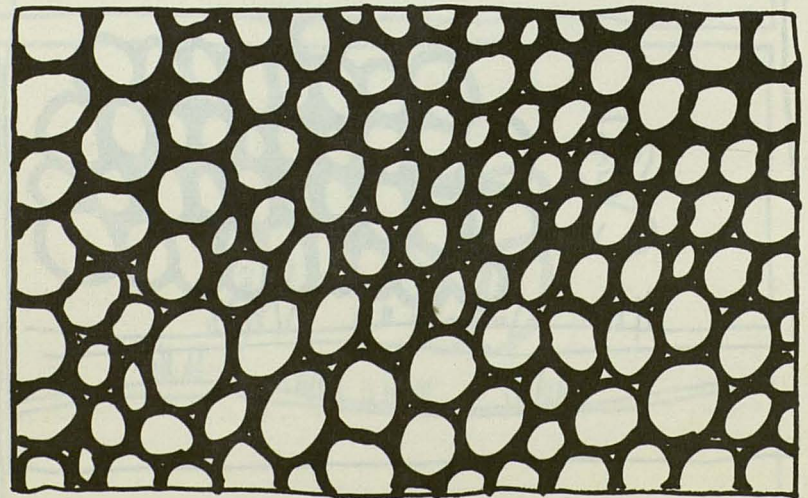
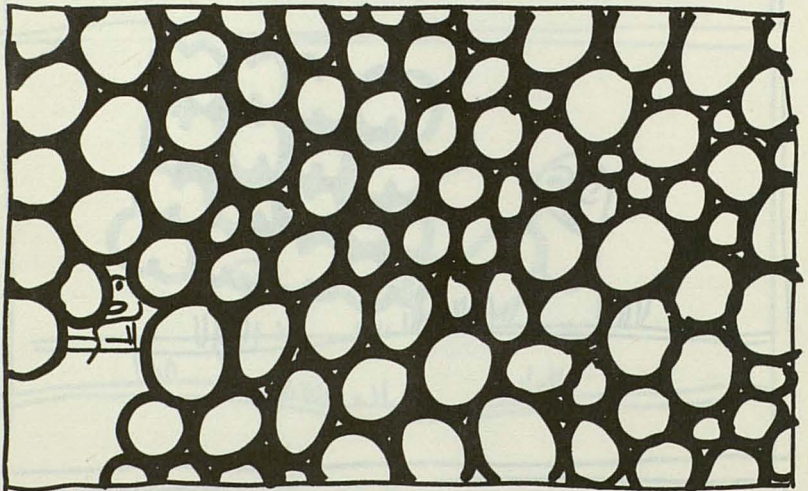
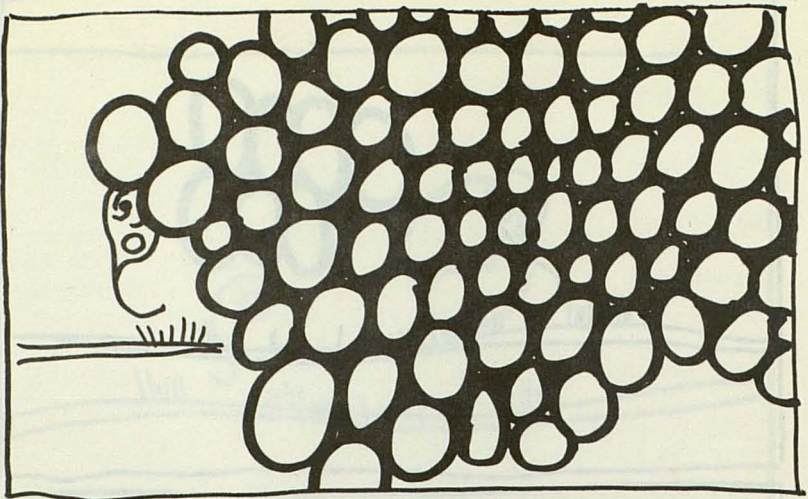
SCENES FROM THE ANIMATED FILM BY
JAN MILLSAPPS

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My Mother was a Light Housekeeper

a story by THYME S. SEAGULL

Hello, Berkeley, your acid sparkled streets glistening through the smog, heartland in the production of rhetoric, land of free boxes, neighborhood warning systems, block dances, food conspiracies, and my relatives. Aunt Riba and Uncle Roy's bright one-story stucco, catty-corner to a decaying mansion--where some of their children live communally.

Rosh Hashonah. I wonder why Jewish New Year begins in the Fall instead of the Spring. The Spring would feel more natural. I reach their doorbell just as mom and dad drive up in their camper. Everyone on time for the holiday dinner. Me, mom and dad have never been here before because Aunt, Uncle, and Sarah, the Old Mother, have just moved to Berkeley to be near their children. Everyone very keyed up. Riba, Roy, and Sarah all answer the door. Excited talking, sharing information about missing members of the clan. Showing family photos. I drift to the rear and notice Sarah, the Old Mother, standing at the doorway to the back porch.

"We had a nice house in D.C.," Sarah says to me in familiar yet surprising Yiddish accents, a sound I have not heard for years. She is very short and stooped, wrinkled, not older but ancient. "It had a lot of room, big backyard, lots of flowers and trees." I can see into the backyard here: tiny.

"Yes, but they left that house and moved here?"

"They wanted to be near the children."

"Your great-grandchildren."

"Yes, them especially, Lillakah and Lil'Umbillakah."

I look wonderingly at the Old Mother, a fantastic survivor. A Ukrainian. She is so short it is easy to overlook her wrinkled face. But I look at her carefully. I had overlooked my own grandmother.

"You knew my Bubie?" (I ask after my grandmother.)

"Yes," Sarah whispers. "A very progressive woman, very progressive. I knew her in Elsinore, when I lived in Los Angeles." The rest of the family is floating towards us. I see mom's attention about to catch onto our conversation. I tighten up and respond quickly, "Yes! I was there too."

"Elsinore is a Yiddishe shtetl," Sarah comments.

"Yes, I know," I whisper quickly, as mom interjects, "Yiddishe shtetl! She doesn't know what you mean, grandma, these kids don't know what it means--" Ha ha ha ha, they laugh about how these kids don't understand.

"I know what it means," I say, but she and Sarah are talking away in Yiddish. (Oy Gottenyu, she's auf tsurus, A Shaynim Donk in Pupik.) It is true I don't understand much.

"It means Jewish ghetto," mom stops long enough to tell me.

"I know."

"Well, that's better than the rest of these kids."

"You only spoke Yiddish to each other, not to us. You and dad spoke in your thick private flavors. We were outside of it; we spoke English in harsh unhappy tones, coping with public school in rural America...But I was in Elsinore and I'm not a total idiot."

Mom blue-eyes me, smiling. Is it ok to come out with it like that? Did I hurt her? A record in Hebrew I never heard before is playing on the stereo. "Anachnu Ve'Atem" is the refrain, a powerful chant from Israel.

"What's that, mom?"

"A song about Us and Them."

I don't know how to ask mom if I have hurt her. It is very beautiful music so it catches us for awhile, then she wanders off to join a conversation with my aunt, who is setting the table. I turn back to the Old Mother. "I know Elsinore is the West Coast shtetl. I could easily see that. The only ones in the streets and the stores are elderly Jews."

"Yes, and they have a community center," says Sarah.

"Yes, I know. Bubie and I went there. To a concert. A woman was singing in an evening gown. Bubie started singing too."

"Yes, she loved to sing. Such a good voice too."

"The people who were running the show didn't think she should sing because it wasn't her concert. A man came over and told her to stop singing. She got really pissed-off. We had to leave. She was mad and didn't want to stay anymore. As we walked out, she muttered resentful curses at the people who ran the community center, all the way out, real loud, everyone heard and turned around as we left."

"She was an individual, very stubborn, very progressive."

The dinner table is covered with white paper, centered with candelabra and dotted with red wine bottles. For a moment I recall the ancient ceremonies, chanting in Hebrew for three hours around the table before we could eat, the ancient ceremonies during which I stared at the matzoh crumbs and the red wine stains on the white paper. While the grandfather chanted in a language I didn't learn, and all the relatives jabbered away in yet another language I did not learn. What does anything mean? I long ago tired of asking, or maybe I never did ask. I am a foreigner in the ancient culture, the languages, the traditions. I am light years away. Or has it only been a generation? In me, the tradition of five thousand years dies. I am the daughter who cannot carry on the family name, practice the ceremonies. I am the daughter who searches for a new tribe. Who searches for primitive solidarity in a new culture of women. What was coherent for them has never been coherent for me.

"Maybe you'd want to write a book review for *Freiheit*?" asks Uncle Roy. (*Freiheit* is a socialist journal which he edits, modeled after the old *Freiheit*.)

"No," I say, flatly and glumly. "I've done that already. Book reviews are fine, but first I want a different space."

"She doesn't want to do journalism anymore, Roy." Aunt Riba. I look at her in surprised gratitude.

"What do you want to write? For whom? To be published in a book? Magazine, where?" Uncle Roy demands.

"A book maybe."

"What, a novel, fiction, what?"

"Something which emanates from the dream consciousness. *Freedom begins in the realm of dreams,*" I quote.

"Freedom is only in the realm of dreams," says Sarah, in Yiddish. Mom translates to the rest of us, the younger generation.

A silence follows. Then Uncle Roy continues dominating the dinner conversation with social, political issues. Mom, dad, and Aunt Riba follow along avidly while the rest of us red diaper babies, in various stages of dress and stress, delicately slurp and gobble the split pea soup, chicken and mushrooms.

"Do you think the working class is becoming more progressive?" asks Uncle Roy of my father.

Dad clears his throat. "Well, I can tell you, from traveling around the country alot and living in trailer parks these last several years, I can tell you they are still very reactionary," says dad, in his slow laryngitic voice.

"Or maybe it's the union leaders who are," adds mom.

Why is it that I am always surrounded by people speculating on the working class--is it capable of transforming itself in the U.S.? can there be a revolution? I am still in the heartland of theory, with my relatives. I haven't seen mom and dad in a year; we've all been traveling around. I want to talk about experiences.

"Who have you met lately? Who travels in these trailers?"

"We met some travelers in Montana who used to live down the road from us," says mom.

"Really, who?"

"Oh, we never knew them when we lived there. They were on their way to moving to Grants Pass, Oregon.....**We** could never move to Grants Pass," mom ends sharply.

"Why not?" I ask, still not getting it.

"Because we're Jews." (Get it, get it?)

"I can't just move anywhere I want either," I say. "I mean lesbians can't." Mom looks at me, somewhat pained.

"Isn't that where you spent the summer, Cheike, around there? At a festival?" Dad.

"What kind of festival?" asks Uncle Roy, perking up.

"A women's spiritual gathering."

"What's that?" he persists.

"Ummm, uh, uhmmm," I look around the table. Everyone is staring down at their chicken, listening intently. What to say? "It was women getting together on land, like a camp-out, to center ourselves as a group. We're developing our own culture." Unfortunately, I get into it and go on. "But we didn't own the land, and the man who owned the land insisted on being there."

"You've gone too far," says dad. "Why do you have to have all-women gatherings and always say, 'Too bad there was a man there'? It's like colored people when they got money at first they went out and bought Cadillacs but now some of 'em drive VW's."

I can't follow the logic of dad's remark so I turn to my aunt and mom, who are sitting together, seeming to agree with dad. "You have to experience working with all women and being with all women. You've been married for decades and decades, how would you know?"

"Oh, I have experience," answers mom, with a touch of hauteur.

"The women at B'nai B'rith used to get together every week," adds Aunt Riba.

"It's not the same thing. You went home to husbands afterwards. Living with men and visiting or going to meetings is different than living with all women..."

At this point my uncle gets up, grandiosely announcing that he will wash the dishes.

"I'm going to help him," says mom, with laughing emphasis.

"How long can a group of women stay together?" asks dad. "It's not like you have kids to keep you together."

I move my mouth to protest. Some lesbians have kids. Why do you need kids to stay together? What does stay-together mean? How important is it? But how can I ask them? **They** don't know.

"Women living just with women, ay meshugge," continues dad. "It's absurd." Almost everyone laughs, thinking of the absurdity of it. Not maliciously, though, it is just ludicrous to them. Nothing I say can make it real; I don't have the answers, the experiences, five thousand years of ritual at my fingertips, five thousand years of red wine at my lips, to make them speak the words from beyond the heartland of rhetoric. I try to imagine my tribe, we who will shout **KinsWoman!** to each other in a tribal tongue. I imagine us in a dance to the light, our own festival of light, into ourselves and into each other, dancing around candles on the Solstice. I imagine saying to the children, "We have danced this dance and chanted this chant for five thousand years. It celebrates the eternal return of the light."

These are the words, but I do not have them.

Walking along the streets of the colonial town where I went to high school, I am with a very open being. A being who has just come into the country from Nepal or Ceylon. But I sense she is the same one from high school, the mysterious Sing, who appeared those years to us in stately silence, elegant, impeccable. Sing, forever the profile of the kiss not taken. I am showing her Main Street.

Then the scene shifts to the farm: Nuovev Jasmine. She has a room under our roof, like a nest in the eaves. We go up to my little bedroom overlooking the pond, right under her nest. As we lie in bed together, we can see the sun rising over the trees around the pond. We are touching, I am touching her face, so tender and clear. She is open to me.

I ask her questions. I take off the last of my clothes and then she does too, smiling, watching me. The softness of her caress across my breast is like silky seaweed on underwater skin. Everywhere I am opened, sensual.

Suddenly, the sense of another. Vashti is sitting hidden in the blankets at the foot of the bed, staring at the sunrise. My younger sister. I feel around the blankets. "So there you are. Why don't you open the downstairs drapes?" (Same view.)

"That's OK, I'm going outside," she says, and goes. I lie back. We're spending the whole day in bed together, timelessly. "I don't know what time it is because I don't have any clocks around," I explain, although it is not necessary. Then the dream changes, turns round. I'm waking up.

Cheike! Cheike! "Are you ready to face reality?" asks my mother, with her own brand of gentle sarcasm. The fragile film of the dream is dissolving. Oh, what was it? The feeling of spending the whole day in bed with a woman, a very large woman who holds me, with long thick red-gold hair. And cascading matzoh boxes at the very end.

Daylight streams into the trailer. Mom turns on the nine o'clock news. Patty Hearst capture news. Reality. I am not lying with my lover. I have no lover. I am with mom and dad in their trailer. California sunshine is bouncing off all the cement and metal in this trailer court.

"Can I turn off the radio?" I leap up, turning off the radio.

"Don't you want to hear what's really happening in the world?"

"I can't do anything to help Patty Hearst. I want to write in my journal."

Mom is washing the dishes, standing firmly in sneakers and anklets. She glances over at the marbled cardboard notebook I open, like the ones from grade school. Back on the farm, it hadn't occurred to me to write in front of anyone, and I had never seen anyone else write. It was a deep dark secret, like what happened behind closed doors in bathrooms and bedrooms.

"Do you ever read it, or do you just write in it?" mom asks.

"No read, just write, ha ha ha." No, I don't show my writing. What if I opened my books to mom and dad, showed my whole self, dark green and silent childhood? But my flippant manner has closed the subject.

"Yes, I re-read it sometimes. I learn from it." Whoever wrote in a journal on the farm? All I ever saw was a locked wooden box of mom and dad's love letters. And my older sister's locked diary, in which she vowed never to tell a future husband she had lost her chastity. Nuovev Jasmine, a paradisaical Jewish chicken farm in the forties and fifties, when adventuring into the interior was called "too subjective." Politics and economics were going to save the era. And politics was what got you in trouble and made people hate you. The childhood faces of the Rosenberg boys haunted my childhood from the back cover of *DeathHouse Letters*. Which sat on their dresser for years, like a permanent fixture. I recall that bedroom, which looked out over the pond. The double bed I had to cover so precisely--but never lie on. The night table next to it on mom's side, upon which sat *The Well of Loneliness* (in paper) and a lamp, also for years.

"Why don't we ever share what it felt like to live at Nuovev Jasmine?"

Mom looks at me warily. I used to be so critical of her. She finishes drying her hands on a dish towel. "What do you want to talk about?"

I feel shaky, on thin ice, but ready to skate--"I hear you calling my name. Like a shattering reverberation over fifty acres of corn stubbles, rattling through the woods. 'Cheikkkkeeeeeeeee.....'

"It is winter, the corn stubbles are frozen, my feet crunch in the snow. I want to explore how the eastern woods look in the snow, the density, the designs, the feeling of the snow transforming an already secret place. It was not a place where anyone accompanied me. I could see dad driving the pick-up on a far western cornfield, heading toward the garbage pit. You were calling from the porch, you wanted me to help with the laundry..." Mom's tan face is frowning.

Is it ok to talk like this? Dad is outside the trailer, I can see him setting up a vise-grip on the back of the camper, his new workroom. A condensation of the garage and feedroom at Nuovev Jasmine. I can see his white hair curling up the back of his neck as he bends forward in concentration. He is making earrings out of nickels. Mom gets up to sweep the floor, commenting that what she does and what dad does is what is most comfortable for each. There is no problem. As she moves around, the trailer shakes, the floor shakes, and the ceiling shakes. Reminding me of dawn. (At dawn the rocking trailer woke mom up. "What's going on?" she asked in a startled urgent voice. From my berth I stopped wiggling and didn't tell her what was going on. Just laughed that I had had a farm dream again.)

"So what? I was doing the laundry...dad was dumping the garbage, you were--"

"What? What was I?"

Mom's eyes light up to answer, "I didn't want you to do the laundry, Cheike. Actually, I wanted you to do the eggs!"

"Ah yes, you wanted me to do the eggs. Remember when the bouncing trailer woke us this morning? I was having a dream of packing eggs!" (I still won't say I was masturbating.) "I was bouncing in my dream." At this point dad comes in and leans against the door frame, listening to us. "Only I'm not packing eggs for Nuovev Jasmine, I'm packing eggs for **Amazonia**. It's clearly printed in blue on the side of each thirty-dozen box. The eggs are all packed strangely, all different sizes--jumbos and pee wees together, checked and cracked, flats and fillers not filled to the proper amounts..."

We all laugh. Yea, the egg room, grading and packing all those years, a fragile egg myself, thin and unexposed, not like those hardy egos developing in the outside world. Eggs falling off the machine and smashing on the cement--eaten by wild chicken coop cats, darting in at the sound--eggs crunched together on the way from the washer to the grader, squeezed and falling, eggs outside crunched by tractor tires, eggshells in the mud. Huge white eggs and little inverts, soft-shelled eggs, malleable in fingers, floppy, lacking--calcium? Lacking the right support...The Large go in the large, the Mediums go in the medium, the Pullets go in the pullet...Experiences rolling down the blue runways of the grader table, and you pack them away fast, so they don't pile up, and ship them in caseloads to the Cities...

But the soft ones, maybe they didn't smash as hard and fast as the firm ones. Eggshells in Amazonia, which exists in our northwoods minds like an Atlantis on land. Like the new continent of Mu. The trick is to

reach Amazonia without these old, almost fatal wounds. Might this trailer understand Amazonia--understand it as the total space, separate culture, the earth and sky. And eggs, mom and dad understood: eggs, seeds, and ponds.

"I want to ask you something, Cheike." Mom, in a serious tone. Oh, no! What is it? "Why did you change your name?"

Reflex: defense. "Because these Anglos can't pronounce Cheike properly."

"It doesn't make sense to me. People will mispronounce your new name too."

"It's a tribal name. I belong to a different tribe now. But I have many names. To you I am still Cheike."

"To me, you are still Baby." She laughs. I don't mind her laugh, but I bring her up to date. "I'm not a baby anymore though, you know, I'm a lesbian woman..."

"Why do you always have to bring up being a lesbian?"

"I hardly ever do--that you hear."

"Like last night."

"Because it fit in. You always think you're different and can't fit in anywhere in small town America, and that's true, but there are lots of reasons why people don't fit in and can't move anywhere they like. It goes double for me. There are very few places I can live. You wonder why I don't settle down, and that's why. I have to find a women's community I can live in..." I look up at dad, who is shaking his head. "What, no?"

"Tell me, Cheike," his old hoarse voice, "do you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist?"

Oh no, that question again. I can pretend I don't know. "I don't know. I did--have to become a lesbian before I could be anything but a feminist literary critic. But that was because my ideas were years ahead of my behavior. Some of my ideas."

"Don't you think women can oppress other women?" pursues dad. "I know some very domineering women."

"Yea, sure. The difference is in a group awareness. Now we try to avoid the roles that reinforce oppression."

"That's you and your friends. There are domineering women."

"I'm talking about what lesbians all over the country are trying to do these days...Let's go to the beach!" I say in sudden inspiration, my fingers almost burning against the hot silver metal outside the open door.

It is our last day together. Mom and dad are heading for Arizona in their trailer and I to Oregon in my VW bug. Everyone agrees to the trip to the beach. We do not rush.

"Tell me, what are you going to do from here? Are you going to settle down?" mom continues.

"You sound like Bubie."

"We're worried about you."

"I see my life as a story: at first I was very threatened. I escaped by running into the pond and going underwater. I held out for a long time, long enough, although once when I did pop up I got shot at. I went under again--long enough to be in a later age, a different time and place. I come up. It feels quiet now, safe now. I go to a house where I feel attracted; a woman is there I want to see. To leave, we have to climb out the second story window down an escape, because of her husband, who wants to continue to possess her. But I want to leave, and she follows me. We go out on a road, which is a ledge, a narrow ledge of ourselves. To the right is an enormous drop; to our left, a sheer cliff wall. We are following the path to Amazonia."

"Where's Amazonia?"

"It's an erotic hillside in Brazil. It's a scenario."

"A scenery? A Brazil scenery?"

"Huh. It's women, all kinds of women, egg women, crying young egg girls growing up in so many shapes and sizes, checked and cracked, who grew up in so many conditions but together at last. Not sorted out into hierarchies, you might say...or I might say, anyway...anarchy and variety are our beginning characteristics."

Silence. Then, "Your generation has had a much better opportunity to associate with each other from different social, religious, and economic backgrounds." Wow! She understands. "Then there's psychological backgrounds and astrological backgrounds...!" I have to add.

"Let's go."

On the way we stop to pick up Daro, a young woman who wants a ride with me to Oregon. May as well start early. Although I don't know Daro at this point, I know that with her along, I won't be outnumbered. I associate her as one on my path.

Daro smiles calmly and swings in the front seat of my bug. Mom and dad are in back. Her vibrant brown eyes beam familiarity.

"Why do women wear beards these days?" asks dad. Oh no, he has noticed Daro's strong stray chin hairs. Daro looks at me suddenly and then turns around to the back seat. "Why don't you?"

Mom comes in here, rendering a textbook lecture on hormonal balances in each sex. She remembers a dark-haired girlfriend from high school who had had chin hair. I glance over at Daro's shoulder, covered with glistening reddish-dark hair. "Was that the one who didn't want you to get married, mom?" I pipe up. "Yes, that was the one."

"It's defiance," says dad. Dad still believes in some of the hierarchies of family and society.

"Defiance! It takes courage to be ourselves in a society with its overpowering demands for a certain look!"

Mom agrees. Dad goes on, "You'd be safer on the streets if your appearance conformed. That's why the Jews got away from wearing payess [side curls], yarmulka's, and black robes. Why do you think? I see some women walking around in ripped dirty jeans. People aren't tolerant. They'll attack you if you look different."

I can tell dad is recalling his boyhood in eastern Poland. He knows what it is like to be hated because of how you look. He is trying to warn

us compassionately, but I am pretty sure he is offending Daro, who stares down at her velvet jeans patches.

"How you look is not reason for men to attack women," says mom.

"Yes, but it makes you stand out, that's when people attack you, when they think you hate them."

"We're into love, not hate, dad."

"The world isn't ready for love."

I stare out along the gorgeous coastline. What is the world ready for, then?

"Let's pull over," I say, and I pick a beach, a pull-in near an artichoke field. Beyond that, there is a promontory with a lighthouse on the end.

"Can you pick any beach?" "Yes," I assure them, "that is what I always do." They have not been to a Pacific beach before. Daro bounds out over the dunes as soon as we stop. Mom and dad settle faces down on a blanket. Dad goes to sleep, and mom reads a *Country Women* magazine I gave her. She unzips the back of her sun-dress. Only the skin around her neck is freckled and tan. Dad's whole back is dark-red bronze, like their faces. The contrast with their white hair strikes me. Mom's blue eyes sparkle out to me. Together with them at last on a Pacific beach, we are a flock of water-sharers. No one else is on the beach, just us refugees from the East--and Daro. Here the ocean is not blocked into swimming areas like the Middle Atlantic, no boardwalks, no saltwater taffy stands, no screaming rides. Just dunes, wildflowers, cliff walls, spun sponge rocks, phosphorescent caves. A freshwater stream--flowing through a crater of sand nearby. Around us--trails of seagull feathers and transparent sacs of jelly.

Daro reappears, examining the purple sac inside one, a glob of jelly fish, watching the bubbles blow within it. She hands me a feather and sinks down on the blanket, resting her hand on my knee. Mom on my other side reaches her hand around me to touch Daro. Her hand doesn't quite reach so she wiggles around and moves up an inch so she can reach. Daro's self-absorption is like soft tissue wrapped around a sharp object. Mom wants to make up for the car conversation. Dad decides to tell a joke. "Once there was a kid who dared her father to eat half a worm: 'I'll eat half if you eat half.' The father takes up the dare and eats half the worm. He gives the other half to the kid, but the kid says, 'You ate the wrong half!'" Daro likes this story and laughs, bowing her head over my lap, laughing.

"I didn't mean anything before about how you look, honey, I was just talking." Dad's laryngitic kindly voice. He has a cold. Daro looks at him and relaxes. He is a grandfather, and tired, smiling inside his thinning curly mop of white hair, his red skin criss-crossed with lines.

"Mom and dad used to be farmers, Daro, now they are gypsies, like us." I want her to know them, to feel safe and accepted with them, as I do, because I feel how suspicious she is of parents. Later, I discover she is more like them than I will ever be. Those three are of the earth, and I am of the air. For years I resisted mom and dad, not just their parental intonations, but as representatives of the material plane itself. The maintenance of a real farm. They had long ago freely admitted to not be-

ing philosopher-poets--my one requirement for the people I live with--but bread-and-butter folks, the people who keep the home front repaired. I was a little Rimbaud monster hatched from the cosmic egg, seeking visions. Later, I learned that air needs the protection of earth, and the earth needs the air to breathe. We unite in the sight of the water and the fire. It would be neat to stay and have a camp fire on the beach.

"I wish I hadn't felt so separated from you two for so long. We could have shared alot more."

"You wouldn't unlock your door," says mom.

"You didn't ask the right questions."

"We didn't realize you felt separated. Parents assume they can tell what's going on, they don't ask questions," says dad.

"Your father didn't converse with you, draw you out, did he, dad?" Dad exhales sharply, like *Are you kidding?* His father was a rabbi from the Old Country, not attentive to the psychology of childhood.

"You know," says mom, "my mother always asked alot of questions and I resented it. I kept my distance from you. I didn't want to intrude like that."

"Oh, I'm a bird, I love like a bird," I say. What is the use of going over the past, the years I spent behind a closed door, a little alcove where I wrote things I never admitted to and gazed at the pond from my attic window. "I was a bird, trapped in an attic." I laugh. And then lapse into broody silence. Daro smiles brightly sparkling brown eyes at me and reaches around, tentatively touching my shoulder. I reach around mom and knead her shoulders. Smooth the little knots. Imagine she is doing the same to me. Dad goes back to sleep. I concentrate on breathing in and out. Mom looks over the *Country Women* magazine I gave her, an issue on "older women." After awhile she says, "What about older men? I don't want to leave my boyfriend." And puts her arm around dad's sleeping form. I don't know; I don't know. My eyes feel tired, either from the sun or from uncried tears. **When** am I going to be with whomever I should be with? And **when** am I going to be wherever I should be? And they, who have each other only, where can they settle down, their new Jerusalem? Not in the same direction as Amazonia. We are cultural refugees together for only a few weeks each year, on our separate roads. Nuovev Jasmine is gone, the pond a swamp again. I haven't been back, but I saw that in a dream. Never again can we skinny dip, boat, or skate on it. The pond is shrunk and dirty, receded from the pier, ukky. The man who bought it turned it into a sewage disposal for his trailer park.

I jump up, facing the vast expanse before us. I want to swim; I rip off my clothes and run down into the tide. Raising my arms high and jumping, a tremendous wave crests beneath me. There is only the Adventure left, only the quest for a new native land. Look at them on the shore, here for only one moment do we inhabit the same reality, here at land's end, mom, dad, Daro and me in the same shot, the same frame. Click!

Over the dunes a man in street dress appears. He says, "This isn't a public beach, it's my beach." So we have to leave here. Dad wants to go anyway, he's not feeling that well. I slip into my soft gym pants, but the

waist drawstring is lost down its slot. I feel tired, I want to flop down, not leave. I feel like a baby, wanting to cry in frustration because I can't get the string to come through the slot. To scream and cry like a baby.

"Mom...?"

"You do it with a safety pin. Here." She stands in front of me, patiently threading the knot through the opening. I stand silently watching, like a pacified toddler. I can see the lighthouse behind her, at the edge of the promontory. Victorious, finished, she stands straight and smiles. Sardonically, she says, "Your mother is a light housekeeper..."

Virgo woman, steadiness and continuation in seas of change, **I salute you.**

©Thyme S. Seagull

Openings

For Carolyn and Marianne

The three of us sit
by the river,
the wind
blows across our blouses,
our breasts,
skims the waterglint
of waves,
fills round sails of small boats
that pass that lean
across the water.

Our laughing is part
of the wind and talk;
you talk of the men you will leave
for each other;
when you kiss
your breasts touch
like lips and tender hands.

Clouds blow across the sun,
air skims my skin,
and there is something unseen
in the wind
that fills me.

-Melanie Perish

The Double Pink Sphinxes

(after a painting of my twin
sister and i my mother made
for her mother, 1951)

i am not afraid to tell you this: i sucked her thumb
thru the bars, she mine/ 'til we tumbled into mother lap
i lived with her as fast and mute
as Siamese cherries

blood on the same day/ neither spoke of
the spoil of tongue
the man rape of our world

we were not the birth fat son

and i am almost sexless for what i have learned
of the womb/ the double

edge of death in this life
i moved first to her/ crawl chub crawl
she to me as mother laugh til cried to see the
de

light

i have found no man who understood

and women as hard put
to not fear what my life thru my eyes shows
that i could have let her kill herself

my guilt, murderer as well

or is it madness to presume
it was out of my head:

i was not capable of stopping
what rape had touched the chemical
transformation. womb crazed - the father's drug
to suicide

i know now/ i felt the same swell
but could not name at seventeen

i lived enclosed virginal as death

i moved towards her flying home
at Easter, knowing something dead wrong
but mother thought it me

making life size men in the sand
watching the waves eat them up

she stood removed/ i could not speak

our tongues stood between us

my feelings of not being a twin

it was too late
those who knew spoke nothing out
those who heard her did not trust the word
and our mother heard nothing
who had lived it before and before

heard nothing i tell you

heard nothing

-mh north

Sisters

(for Sharon)

you might come into my house and not know this, but
i will tell you because i may come into your house
and someone, a stranger to me

susceptible, kind
will say, "is this your sister?"

you will not have thought, having conjured
a mother, not your mother, but a mother
of specifications fulfilling to you as
your mother's were lacking

but a sister?
and i, because i had a perfect sister
am thought to be your sister or
as in the special case of Sharon

am wanted by her as a sister
and in the first instance
like with Janet, this happens:

Janet, much taller
larger boned than i, not in anyway resembling each other
though both Aries, and i went to get milk and butter
at a neighbor's house
in the kitchen that kind black woman asked
was i her sister

i, overwhelmed,
wanted to stay, ask her why she had asked
wanted to hold to the moment
that issued my sister again

Janet said no
we did not talk of it

but my sister is still
a constant changeling i am just discerning
telling me something about sisters
i am trying to grasp
her identical shape taking other shapes,
fooling the susceptible eye.

-mh north

Jean-Paul Sartre as a NO to Women

by Peggy Holland

Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting.

-Simone de Beauvoir

Jean-Paul Sartre has for the past thirty years been in the forefront of the French existential movement. Through his liberal political stance and his much publicized relationship with Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre has gained the reputation of being a politically astute and conscious man. His declaration of support for the French women's movement has contributed to this reputation, and no doubt influenced some women in his favor. Women's acceptance of Sartre has gone so far that, at times, his philosophy has been uncritically included in Feminist Studies courses.

In this article I would like to show that though one might gain a favorable impression of Sartre through a knowledge of his political associations, when one looks at his philosophy a wholly different picture emerges. I will rely primarily on *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's main philosophical treatise, in which he discourses on the obscenity of the female sex and describes women as "holes" and as "the slimy." I will also show that though Simone de Beauvoir in her philosophical work *The Ethics of Ambiguity* partially agrees with Sartre's philosophy, in her monumental feminist work *The Second Sex* she opposes the kind of objectification which misogynism represents.

The following quote in which Sartre succinctly describes the relationship of the oppressors to the oppressed leaves no doubt as to his understanding of the implications of oppression. He writes:

In a prohibition or a veto, for example, the human being denies a future transcendence...It constitutes itself in its own flesh as the nihilation of a possibility which another human reality projects as *its* possibility. For that reason it must arise in the world as a *No*; it is as a *No* that the slave first apprehends the master, or that the prisoner who is trying to escape sees the guard who is watching him. There are even men (e.g. caretakers, overseers, gaolers), whose social reality is uniquely that of a *No*...¹

It is my contention that the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre is, for women, essentially a *No*.

In his philosophy Sartre divides being into two categories. Being-for-itself is that being which is what it is not and is not what it is; in other words, it is simply being which is always moving and transcending. To this he contrasts being-in-itself, which coincides with itself and does not desire or incorporate change. Being-in-itself is the being of mere things. Obviously, within these categories, women's being is best described as being-for-itself. However, men, acting in bad faith and under the guise of nature, have made a patriarchal world² within which the situation of women is that of the Other. We have been prohibited the exercise of our freedom, cut off from our transcendence, denied the "power to name ourselves [and] the world,"³ and given such debilitating names as "passive." This has occurred because men, seeing women as the Other, have attempted to lock us into this mode of being (actually non-being), trying to make us like being-in-itself. †

Sartre, in his philosophy, which reflects the historical reality of patriarchy, has attempted to make women appear as objects and to push our existence out of the realm of transcendent being. He presents man as The Human, compares woman to him, realizes that she is different, and asserts that this difference is a lack in woman--naming her the Other. By means of this philosophy, Sartre presents a resistance to women's authentic becoming which is very different from the nothingness, absurdity, ambiguity, and responsibility of the human situation; it is man-made. In promoting this philosophy of oppression through denial, he has substantiated a lie.

Sartre claims that his philosophy is "a doctrine which makes human life possible."⁴ As I pointed out above, he divides being into being-in-itself which is glued to itself, and being-for-itself which is the being of consciousness and does not coincide with itself. Because being-for-itself is free it sets up projects and through action is always transcending its situation. As he says in *Being and Nothingness*, "human reality...is a choice of being,"⁵ and "Human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is."⁶ This human freedom is based on the belief that essence does not precede existence; to presume otherwise would be to imply a human nature and determinism.

On this point Simone de Beauvoir agrees with Sartre. For she points out in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that "freedom can not will itself without aiming at an open future."⁷ As it is, individuals are thrown into the world, surrounded by nothingness, and make themselves. All are responsible to engage themselves in the world, to make choices, to set up projects, and to act in a way that is continually disclosing their being. However, some may try to escape the anguish of this responsibility. Sar-

†Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 111. Sartre writes, "So far as my being is concerned, there is no difference between being and non-being if I am cut off from my project."

tre calls this attempt to flee being "bad faith." Essentially, bad faith is a lie to oneself about the ambiguity which characterizes humanness.

THE OBSCENITY OF THE FEMALE SEX

What I am suggesting is that from reading Sartre's philosophical works one can see that, for him, this human existence and the freedom which characterizes it apply to men only. Women's situation is something quite different. In *Being and Nothingness* when presenting his psychoanalysis of "things," Sartre writes:

It is only from this standpoint that we can pass on to sexuality. The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which 'gapes open.' It is an *appeal to being* as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by *penetration* and *dissolution* [italics mine]. Conversely woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is 'in the form of a hole'...Beyond any doubt her sex is a mouth and a voracious mouth which devours the penis—a fact which can easily lead to the idea of castration...the hole...is an obscene expectation, an appeal to the flesh.⁸

For Sartre, the physical difference between men and women becomes a physical lack in women, and from there slides into an ontological difference and lack in the female. In referring to "the obscenity of the feminine sex," Sartre implies that obscenity is intrinsic to being female, that the obscene precedes or coincides with female existence. Thus for the female, existence does not precede essence, since it is not that we make ourselves obscene or take on the form of a hole, but rather that we are in the form of a hole, and are therefore obscene by our natures.

In the passage cited above Sartre claims that being "in the form of a hole" renders women "*an appeal to being* as all holes are." He thereby throws women out of the realm of being-for-itself (transcendent being) by contending that women must rely on an existent outside of ourselves, namely men, for being.

This philosopher not only believes the female to be lacking, but believes that this lack is her very "being." Could the female exist without the male? It appears not since we require "a strange flesh" to "penetrate" us in order to be transformed "into a fullness of being." Or if we did exist without the male our existence would not be that of a complete being; rather we would be a form waiting to have life blown into us.† However, what would this life, this being that women are to receive, consist of? Sartre uses the words "*penetration and dissolution*" to describe that which is required to transform women into "a fullness." *Webster's New World Dictionary* describes *penetration* as "the depth to which something penetrates, as a projectile, into a target, or a military force into enemy territory." Sartre's language, then, evokes the comparison of a woman to a "target" and "enemy territory." Could it be that Sartre is describing the war of the sexes with a new twist? Is he insinuating that women should see men/projectiles/military force as our

†This is not really an original idea if one recalls the myth of the male god creating the female form and instilling life in her with his breath.

saviors, our hope for "fullness of being"? Just what kind of transformation is wrought by "penetration"? Could Sartre be creating a philosophy corresponding to the rapist "It's what every woman wants/needs" mentality?

One may find clues through understanding the other word he uses to describe the transformation into a "fullness of being" which women require:

Dissolution--a) a breaking up or into parts; disintegration. b) the termination as of a ...union. c) the ending of life; death.⁹

Indeed it appears that the result of transformation through penetration and dissolution is dismemberment and death. Deceitfully, Sartre has advocated the destruction of women under the guise of "being."

So here one finds Sartre's "No" to women. By claiming that women require "transformation" through "a strange flesh," he has lied about our being, our nature, and our form. His aim is prevention--preventing women from realizing our freedom; his method is deceit, for he attempts to deceive us about our nature by asserting that we are obscene. Sartre does not merely place women's transcendent potential in question. He abolishes it. Insidious as this is, he is not satisfied with expressing his negative views. His object is to have women internalize this negation. For he goes on to say that not only do men see women as an appeal to being--but that women too see ourselves as an appeal--("Woman senses her condition as an appeal", etc.; see quotation⁸).

In opposition to this Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out that:

She does not experience this absence as a lack; evidently her body is, for her, quite complete; but she finds herself situated in the world differently from the boy; and a constellation of factors can transform this difference, in her eyes, into an inferiority.¹⁰

One of the factors in this constellation is the sort of attitude revealed in Sartre's philosophy of female reduction. If a woman sees herself as a lack or an obscene appeal, it is because she has internalized phallic ideology of this type.

Moreover, what is to be said of Sartre's claim that the female being "in the form of a hole" is "above all" the cause of the castration complex. It seems that he is skipping a step here. The castration complex can only occur in a man since his penis is a protrusion which can be cut off. If this were not the case the vagina could not appear to him as a voracious mouth. Furthermore, there is no reason for the vagina to appear as a voracious mouth or as an appeal to the female since it is not going to devour any part of her body, but is, rather, a part of it.

Sartre degrades female existence to that of a gaping open hole. According to his philosophy we are not beings who, through a relationship to ourselves, make ourselves; indeed, it seems that we are not selves. Instead we are an expectation which requires the male. As Simone de Beauvoir has pointed out, within patriarchal ideology, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other."¹¹ By degrading women, Sartre is boosting his (and men's) opinion of himself.

THE HOLE, THE SLIMY AND LOVE

In approaching this section on "sexuality" Sartre describes the mode of being of the female as opposed to that of the male. He begins by discussing "holes" and "the slimy." Both of these, for him, represent the female. Concerning the former he writes:

The hole is originally presented as a nothingness 'to be filled' with my own flesh;...It presents itself to me as the empty image of myself. I have only to crawl into it in order to make myself exist in the world which awaits me. The *ideal* [italics mine] of the hole is then an excavation which can be carefully moulded about my flesh in such a manner that by squeezing myself into it and fitting myself tightly inside it, I shall contribute to making a fullness of being exist in the world. Thus to plug up a hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plenitude of being may exist...¹²

Once again Sartre refers to the threatening mouth and the castration complex in general. He claims there is a sacrifice and some fear involved for the male in filling up these holes; however, there are also rewards. The hole gives itself in order to help him exist in the world. He becomes by using it. By filling holes, he is able to be fulfilled. Indeed, "the *ideal* of the hole" is that which will make men's being exist in the world. Since an ideal is a "model or archetype," Sartre is persisting in his project to model archetypal females; that is, women who are useful to men.

Pursuing his slick theme further, Sartre writes the following edifying description of "the slimy" which for him is:

...like the flattening of the full breasts of a woman who is lying on her back...the slimy gives us...the impression that it is a being which can be possessed.¹³

Further on he writes that "the slimy":

...gives me the impression I am perpetually *destroying* it...It is a soft, yielding action, a moist and feminine sucking...it draws me to it as the bottom of a precipice might draw me.¹⁴

Again the negative side of the world is personified by the female. Aligned with the slimy, the hole, and a precipice, she represents nothingness. By "internal negation"† Sartre has set up a situation in which the woman is named empty, though through a man she may hope to become complete. If this ruse is successful, the woman, believing that she requires a man, will abdicate her freedom and replace her project of authentic becoming with a project of union with him. Indeed, this is what Sartre defines as love:

He wants to be loved by a freedom but demands that this freedom as freedom should no longer be free...he wants this freedom to be captured *by itself*, to turn back upon itself, as in madness, as in a dream, so as to will its own captivity. This captivity must be a resignation that is both free and yet chained in our hands.

†*Ibid.*, p. 243. Sartre writes, "By an internal negation we understand such a relation between two beings that the one which is denied to the other qualifies the other at the heart of its essence--by absence...the denial itself comes to influence the inner structure of the positive being who has been denied the quality...It characterizes me within; as negative it is a real quality of myself...and this negative quality will explain my melancholy as well as, for example, my failures in the world."

Further on he draws the obvious conclusion that:

...if the Other loves me then...

I must be the absolute end.‡

Sounds like *Story of O* does it not? Half the human population has now been assigned the role of this captive Other whose transcendence projects itself toward the lover who is set up as her limit. This relationship is similar to that of the slave and master though it is more insidious and may be more demanding. Because it is under the guise of love, nature, and choice, it becomes the resignation of self, mind, and body. The woman, thinking that salvation lies in union with a man, will focus all her energy on him. However, her efforts at transcendence will be turned to immanence when he uses this same energy to make a world without and against her.

AN ANESTHESIA OF DETERMINISM

Simone de Beauvoir has said of woman, "If she did not exist men would have invented her. They did invent her."¹⁵ Indeed, I think this is what Sartre, and men in general, have done. Aided by their brand of preventive medicine (prevention of freedom, subjectivity, etc. in women) males have performed an operation on women by which they remove what is fearful to them and replace it with what will be useful to them. Dulled under the influence of an anesthesia of determinism, women accept the prescribed antidote to femaleness, thereby relinquishing themselves under the false hope of something better, more fulfilling. Through this manipulation it becomes possible for men to use women in order to lay hold of the world and nature.

As Sartre said in *Existentialism and Human Emotions*:

Love is a fundamental relation of the for-itself in the world...the woman represents only a conducting body which is placed in the circuit.†

His use of the passive voice is telling; for example the phrase "a conducting body which is placed" certainly does not inspire an image of an active woman. Rather, having been rendered helpless and hopeless, she is merely an inert utensil for his appropriation. If a woman is "only a con-

‡Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 479, and 481.

This concept of love in Sartre's presentation holds some very interesting similarities to the relationship of oppressor and oppressed which Simone de Beauvoir develops in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. She shows that it is the activity of the oppressor to continuously feed himself on the transcendence of the oppressed.

†Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, p. 60.

Men use women as connections to the natural world. At the same time men make society in such a way that in order for women to be part of it, they must use men as a connection. "At the same time I *present* the world to the beloved and I try to constitute myself as the necessary intermediary between her and the world; I manifest by my acts infinitely varied examples of my power over the world (money, position, 'connections,' etc.). In the first case I try to constitute myself as an infinity of depth, in the second case to identify myself with the world." from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 485. If women accept men as the "intermediary," the place they will have is the one assigned to them.

ducting body" it is because the patriarchs have had the power to destroy her, or as Sartre has misnamed it--"to transform" her into a "fullness of being."

An understanding of the dynamics of internal negation is essential to a comprehension of Sartre's method (see page 77):

By an internal negation we understand such a relation between two beings that the one which is denied to the other qualifies the other at the heart of its essence--by absence.

Sartre has qualified and defined women in terms of men. Women, for him, equal non-men. It is our not being men that defines us, it is our lack of maleness that limits us. Naturally if one is defined in terms of what one lacks, one is also defined in terms of what one needs. Men equal being, women are not men therefore women need men for being. Sartre's definition of women describes us in terms of "is not" and tends to produce the same effect he describes when discussing the homosexual. The friend/critic who says:

'He's *just* a paederast,' removes a disturbing freedom from a trait and aims at henceforth constituting all the acts of the Other as consequences following strictly from his essence.¹⁶

This "*just*" accompanies every "she," "her," and "woman" into the world. This "*just*" attempts to qualify us at the core of our being. Through a malicious distortion Sartre has, in his writings, reduced all female being to (only) an appeal, the docile, the slimy, a hole, a body; (only) a woman. He has created a philosophy in support of a misogynistic society.

This expression of misogyny behind the facade of a phenomenological ontology which accepts no human nature, is a classic example of deceit and bad faith.

To deceive is to use the other as an object, for it is to make him [sic] an instrument to an end he [sic] has not chosen.¹⁷

Since the individual would never will the suppression of her own consciousness and freedom, this suppression must originate as a deception and ruse outside of herself. And as Sartre has pointed out, the deceiver must be conscious of exactly what is being suppressed:

I must know in my capacity as deceiver the truth which is hidden from me in my capacity as the one deceived...I must know the truth very exactly *in order* to conceal it more carefully...¹⁸

The truth which Sartre is turning away from is that women are not holes for men to use in order to make themselves; neither are we conducting bodies to be used as connections in their appropriation of the world; nor are we appealing to men in order to be made into a fullness of being. If men have made us serve these purposes, it has been by disconnecting us from our own projects. They have used their freedom to deny ours.

Sartre's philosophy is a blatant expression of the prevailing false mythology about women, our nature and our existence. It is a negative

mythology, and the image it creates amounts to a determinism. It has been a No, a prohibition and a veto to women. Sartre has described us negatively and he has negated us. He has ascribed limits to us which have their source in lacks which he has assigned to us. He has done this under the guise of a philosophy of freedom. However, once one has the courage to look, the concealment, like the emperor's new clothes, turns out to be transparent and one sees a man who hates and fears women. As this man has said:

Every man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, every man who sets up a determinism, is a dishonest man.¹⁹

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956; Pocket Books, 1975), pp. 86-87.

²Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

On p. 15, Daly writes, "The roles and structures of patriarchy have been developed and sustained in accordance with an artificial polarization of human qualities into the traditional sexual stereotypes. The image of the person in authority and the accepted understanding of 'his' role has corresponded to the eternal masculine stereotype, which implies hyper-rationality (in reality, frequently reducible to pseudo-rationality), 'objectivity,' aggressivity, the possession of dominating and manipulative attitudes towards persons and the environment, and the tendency to construct boundaries between self (and those identified with the self) and 'the Other.' The caricature of human being which is presented by this stereotype depends for its existence upon the opposite caricature--the eternal feminine. This implies hyper-emotionalism, passivity, self-abnegation, etc."

For an excellent history of the social degeneration from matriarchy to patriarchy see, Elizabeth Gould Davis, *The First Sex* (New York: Putnam, 1971).

³Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 8.

⁴Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957), p. 10.

⁵Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 768.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁷Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (Sacaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1972), p. 71.

⁸Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 782.

⁹*Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1974, s.v. "dissolution."

¹⁰Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by H.M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1971), p. 272.

¹¹de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. xvi.

¹²Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 781.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 775.

¹⁴Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 776.

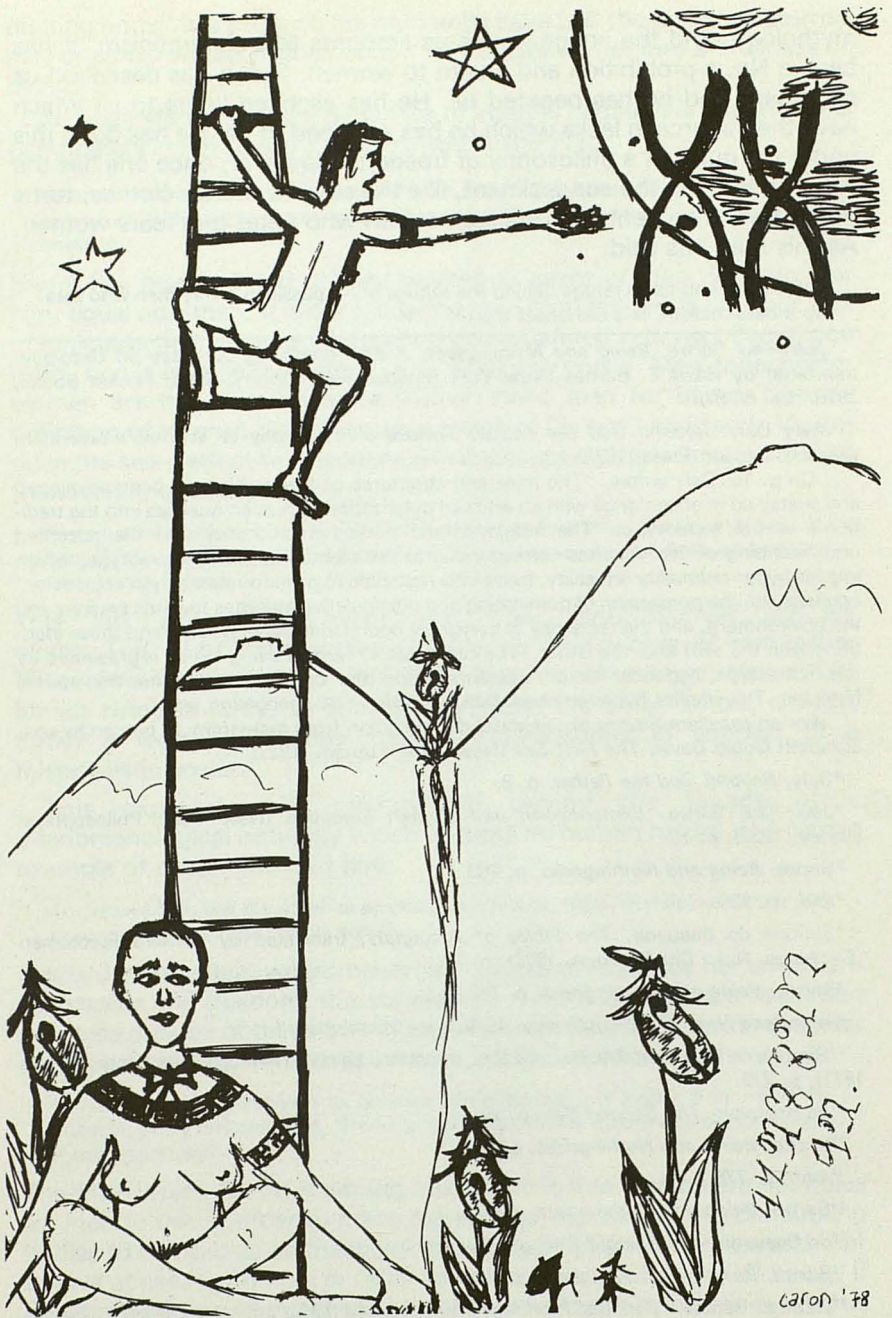
¹⁵de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 186.

¹⁶Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 108.

¹⁷Hazel E. Barnes, "Personal Pronouns," in *An Existentialist Ethics*; ed. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 357.

¹⁸Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 89.

¹⁹Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, pp. 44-45.



Lot
of
Lilies & Lotus

caron '78

drawing by caron

Excerpt from **BERRIGAN**

by GINGERLOX

"Linda Framer's parents will crap, Evelyn, absolutely keel over!"

"Good. We'll give them a new 'Family Forum' topic. Maybe we'll even end up in their Christmas letter. I can see our blurb now: 'Dear Friends: we've spent the better part of this year incredulous and disgusted over the unexpected relationship between Evelyn Walker and a very questionable Bingham woman, Berrigan. And to think Linda and Evelyn used to be in the same swim club! Whatever happens to all the good girls these days?'"

"You were really in the same swim club?"

"Are you kidding? Linda and I were the water wizards of Hartford's Country Club! We got breasts before anyone else did and so we were better floaters. Being an aqua-deb has made me what I am today!"

"What you are today is in hot water. You've been branded a dyke sympathizer, which is much worse than being an Indian giver or even a commie pinko. Evelyn, aren't you worried about this affecting your heavy dater reputation?"

"I'm more worried about how it affects my allowance from my father, his honor The Mayor!"

Despite the rumors and gossip and questions, Berrigan and Evelyn had made an instant connection and were determined to develop a friendship. They became kite flying beer buddies, sharing 3-dip sundaes and attempted tune-ups on Evelyn's old VW. Evelyn loved any hint of adventure; Berrigan was drawn into her risk-taking schemes. The women offered each other an unassuming support and insulation from collegiate trivia. At once friends and comrades in no cause larger than good times, they were not afraid to touch but dispensed with further analysis of it....

Berrigan located the name and address of a women's bookstore in New York and from their mailing list obtained copies of several popular political newspapers. These she shared with Evelyn, whose natural intellectual curiosity led her to devour this new kind of writing perspective. They marveled at the many issues-within-issues they had never considered, and the sophistication obvious in some of the more "slick" literary magazines. Their favorite section of these publications were the "coming out" stories. All manner of techniques were exhibited in these, from maudlin melodrama to terse accounts of the "pain and searching" to candid remembering of the bliss of first love.

In reading a particularly graphic coming out story, Evelyn admitted to having been naive about some lesbian sexual practices which were detailed in the story. Berrigan chided her, disbelieving her lack of knowledge.

"I never claimed I was an expert on lesbians, you know. To know one is not to know all things on the subject!"

"As a matter of fact, you've never told me how you learned about lesbians, Evelyn. So fess up! Was it hinted at darkly in a psychology class? Or giggled about in P.E.?"

"No, nothing as perverse as that. Frankly, as I recall, I had a girlfriend when I was 8 and we loved to spend the night together. We'd hug and kiss and spend hours in the shower trying to snap each other with a wet towel. That's probably the only unconditional trust I've ever felt with another person and I didn't even know it! It's too bad I was not the genius at 8 that I am today..."

"But the first time I actually found out about the *word* lesbian was during my sophomore year of high school, when I joined a drama group. Pep club and cheerleader weren't for me. Too much sweating for a debutante, after all! Debate was a prestige ultimate, but I couldn't make that grade so I went into duet acting and giving readings...I had a personal battle going with two junior debaters: Christie Fargess and Anatole Benchley. Christie touted her good looks to everyone and Anatole thought she was hot shit because of her name. They were good debaters, but they were such snips!"

"Anyway, they used to tease me because I thought I was hot shit over my breasts and swim club but I hadn't made it into debate. We were all talented but obnoxious as hell in our struggles with pubescent urgencies, zits, and prestige.

"Talk about competitive! Drama and debate was all part of the same class and sabotage ran high: we stole each other's notebooks right before a test, and Anatole even went so far as to put a sack of sour garbage in my locker. I'm sure she paid a freshman to do that--she herself would never handle garbage, not even for revenge on me! But our favorite trick was to try and run each other's hose. One time, Christie and Anatole grabbed me just as class dismissed and the hall filled with students. In the rush, no one could see them give my garter belt two quick scissor snips. In the aftermath, I was standing red-faced in the hallowed hallway of the Hartford Academy for Girls with my hose coiled merciless around my ankles."

Berrigan, laughing, commented, *"God, I bet you were embarrassed!"* Evelyn nodded.

"Luckily I was not the only underdog in the drama class. I had a friend in misery, Holly Marple, daughter of a Westinghouse VP. She was more experienced than I in the matter of boys, and so when we weren't busy preguessing the next act of sabotage Anatole and Christie might try, we were discussing sex and how far to go. Holly was on the verge of going all the way, despite my counsel that she hold off.

"After an evening of insistent jostling in the back seat of a car with a guy she thought she loved, Holly came to me upset and weepy. We stepped into a stairwell so our conversation would not be intercepted by any of our teachers, those ardent guardians of our proper growth and development.

"Who should appear to witness this exchange of compassion but our arch-rivals, Christie and Anatole. Sighting us in our cubbyhole of distress, they chanted, 'Thesbians, thesbians, you two are thesbians!' A tearful Holly grew indignant and challenged them.

"You don't even know what a thesbian is, so go blow off!"

"Anatole snorted. 'You're the ignorant ones! If you knew what thesbians were, you wouldn't be hugging in the stairwell!'

"We weren't hugging!' I stormed. 'Holly's upset about...' whereupon Holly's hand clapped securely over my mouth.

"Thesbians had to live on an island away from everyone else because they were so dirty,' Christie told us in a 'nyeah-nyeah' voice. 'Alls they did was wear gowns and suck grapes. That's why people call them fruits! They just laid around kissing each other and playing on lutes!'

"Yeah, lutes!' Anatole agreed. 'They were burned in England for being nasty and kidnapping children and robbing old ladies! In mythology, Zeus found out his own daughter was a thesbian and turned her face into a bunch of snakes!'"

"I thought then that Holly might forget all her well-coaxed manners and jump on Anatole and pull her hair. But the juniors figured they'd made their point and ran up the stairs, echoing back at us, 'Thesbians, thesbians, faces full of snakes!'

"I asked Holly if there was such a thing as a thesbian but she wasn't sure. 'But I don't think you better ask anyone either.' Knowing me, I wasn't about to ponder long. Just as Holly ignored my advice not to surge into womanhood too soon, I ignored her advice to keep the taunt of thesbian to myself.

"I went to the source of answers for all my questions, my mother. She was good about not making me feel stupid, even though I'm sure I jolted her by discussing such things as farting in the movies. I wasn't sure she was ready to decipher thesbians to me but I had to know. I knew I could count on that secret liberal part of her to enlighten me. Underneath that well manicured, golf-at-nine/bridge-at-four society matron burned a spark of free thought! This aspect of herself she shared with me only when we were completely alone and my father was nowhere in sight. In such rare moments, I found out wonderful things about her: she believed in reincarnation, loved unicorns, and avidly read history books about frontier settlement. 'How do you think our French Regency furniture would have looked in a sod house?' she once joked with me.

"When I related my encounter with Christie and Anatole to her, omitting of course the true nature of Holly's dismay, Mother patted me with her cool hand.

"Evelyn, girls will probably be jealous of you all your life. So you must expect that they may be cruel. Envy has a way of making one short

sighted. A thespian is a person who acts, like you, in drama. A lesbian is a woman who loves other women. Anatole and Christie have managed ably to confuse the two,' she told me.

"My mother's cool hand upon me was benediction for complete resolve and safety. I asked her if lesbians were dirty and nasty lute players and if it was true they were burned. Were they still burned? I'll never forget what my mother told me.

"Some people view anything different as evil and nasty,' she told me. 'I don't know about the lutes; they are a unique instrument with a beautiful sound. Lesbians probably were burned as witches and I guess they still are, in a way. You know, burned by insults and judgments.

"Sarah Bernhardt was a *thespian*, very famous and successful. She had great strength as a dramatic artist, but was not made masculine by a strenuous career. I would be proud if you were like her. But I'm proud of you anyway."

Evelyn sat quietly for a moment when she finished her story, savoring the memory of the conversation with her mother. Berrigan respected her silence, saying nothing to interrupt her thoughts. Finally Evelyn said, "So that's my story on lesbian thespians."

"There's a nice story there about mothers and daughters, too."

"Uh huh. Come on. Let's go fly a kite!"

Berrigan by Gingerlox will be published by Naiad Press, September, 1978. Order from Naiad Press' new address: 7800 Westside Drive, Weatherby Lake, Mo. 64152; \$5.50 + 15% postage/handling.

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Cresting

Ambushed
by the night
Our open mouths
stripping moon silver

bodies spinning
light
angles going round
the particulars of you

my tongue
remembers
Asleep the air
pulsing between us

Naming

Early
you wake me:
a mischievous
spark of orange dawn

claiming I've palmed slivers of color
from every corner
of the room
I'm being hugged by

the sun
No it's your
mouth wet with light
huing my body

After Autumn

Careful
Note the first
small bruises take
color: the upstart

voice you don't swallow
my unready hands
Behind the casual rhythms
of ritual wait

silent
reservoirs:
the two of us
will spring with the rain

-Jennifer Turner

Coercive Consensus

by Sarah L. Hoagland

In *Sinister Wisdom* 5 (Winter, 1978) Leigh Star named Lesbian feminism the alter state of consciousness, a naming which focuses Lesbian feminism's opposition to patriarchy. She named consensus reality (the "normal," patriarchal state of consciousness) socially created and coercively maintained. I want to explore this second naming further. I pass through this speaking to clarify my perception so I'll know better when I'm being dragged/lulled by (patriarchal) structures back into (patriarchal) logic.¹ While Lesbian feminists realize an alter state of consciousness, we engage in a deadly minuet with madness. I and Leigh and many others poise over an abyss with one foot in patriarchy and one in Lesbian Nation. We face a precarious situation, all the more precarious because we create a new reality; it does not yet exist in its entirety. I pass through this speaking to regain my balance.

If patriarchal descriptions of reality persist as a matter of consensus (if objectivity is nothing but a collection of perceptions which agree), how are these descriptions coercively maintained?

A TRAP

We face punk rock: The Sex Pistols, The Dead Boys, Elvis Costello, The Runaways, The Ramones, Television, Talking Heads...merely more blatant than other male and male-identified rock. We face pornography: snuff movies. (My blood runs cold as I think to myself, once a womyn is tied up, what could she do to stop them?) We face the liberal defense of snuff movies or of *Hustler Magazine* as the ERA rides to defeat. We face John Wayne characters who "know" that when a womyn says yes she's a slut and deserves it, and that when a womyn says no, she means yes--to masculine is to abuse wimmin. Men name us objects of violence.

Men also name us objects of protection. The boys depict us as needing special protection. But of course, someone in need of protection must first be made conceptually "vulnerable" (impotent).² Male rhetoric sets us up. Men perform the dual role of protector/predator--pseudo opposing activities. These activities appear opposite because they stand at opposite ends of a very narrow continuum within patriarchal framework, a framework of male power, control, potency. But they each depend on the other for existence. A man cannot be a predator

unless there is something in need of protection. And he cannot protect unless there is something "vulnerable" to predation. These concepts structure reality and our understanding.³ The boys appear to describe reality when they talk of measures they must institute to "protect" us, but in fact they create a particular conceptual framework.

Any time the subject of wimmin arises, that conceptual framework surfaces. When we demand equal rights, we engage in defending ourselves. Yet our very demand contributes to the consensus: the "selves" we wind up defending are the product of patriarchal naming, description, perception, and we soon discover they cannot be defended. When a womyn says, "I have a right to defend myself against rapists," or "I have a right to the control of my body," that "I" becomes a function of the language of patriarchal description, buried in the framework of violence and protection. In defending ourselves, we ask men to grant the rights and responsibilities of autonomy to one they think dependent, passive, impotent--to one from their viewpoint incapable of autonomy.

To prove we do not fall into the category of wimmin deserving predation, we must seek male protection and approval. Black wimmin are especially trapped by the pseudo-dichotomy of protection/predation: Daniel P. Moynihan formalized the theory of the Black Matriarch who undermines the "Negro" family by "castrating" Black men.⁴ Black wimmin are told that Black people will be subjugated so long as Black men do not masculine Black wimmin. And Black feminists are accused of dividing the Black community. But taming Black wimmin is the business not only of the Black community but also of the dominant white male culture. One sees efforts in every aspect of the mass media to domesticate Black wimmin, to capture their power, lest it continue to inspire white wimmin.

Any womyn, whether or not she attempts to attract a protector, may "attract" a predator. In light of the facts of wife abuse and so-called incest (daughter rape), we now know that we cannot distinguish a protector from a predator save by what a man actually does at a given moment.

Nor can society in general: A womyn is regularly and without shame held liable for her own rape. She is considered guilty until proven innocent. Even when she is "legally innocent," i.e., when the rapist is convicted, men around her hold her responsible, forcing her to deal defensively with her immediate situation, keeping her from understanding it in perspective. *A womyn is the object of male passion and thus considered the cause.*

This confusion of *object* with *cause* of male passion pervades our lives. A womyn who is the object, the target of male action, is *not* thereby the cause. In other areas of their lives, men maintain the distinction. They distinguish between object and cause when the object of their attention is Mr. P. and a business deal, whereas the "cause" is their "good business sense" plus a desire for a deal, a desire not caused by Mr. P.

Abused wives are the targets, and so considered the cause, of male passion. Thus the New Hampshire Commission on the Status of Women

blocked efforts last fall to establish battered wives' centers, arguing that any increase in wife abuse results from the feminist movement which encourages wives to be "uppity" and so to incur the (deserved) wrath of their husbands.

Two hundred thousand Bengali wimmin felt the full force of male confusion/patriarchal substitution of cause for object. Bengali men held their mothers, their sisters, their grandmothers, great-grandmothers, wives, daughters, granddaughters, great-granddaughters, aunts, great aunts, nieces, grand-nieces, daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law, and mothers-in-law all responsible for their own rapes in the Bangladesh War.⁵ In light of this evidence, we are tempted to say (agree) that wimmin need special protection.

CONSENSUS

Perception of reality is a matter of consensus in that certain "presuppositions," the foundation, go unquestioned, held in place by what surrounds them. They have no ultimate justification, nor do they justify, as the conservative scientific approach suggests.

The conservative scientific approach holds that (1) fact ultimately justifies our explanations (descriptions) of human behavior, (2) fact is capable of exposing "errors" in our descriptions, and (3) scientists achieve objectivity by removing all human valuation from their descriptions/explanations.

Scientists who fall obviously short of objectivity are accused of "observer bias." But the majority of the members of the social science community hold that "observer bias" is accidental rather than essential to observation. And to achieve objectivity, scientists aim at impartiality: They work to see themselves as qualitatively different from the objects of their investigation. As a result, science establishes as objective and authoritative the perspective of the scientist while, in the name of impartiality, excluding any reference to the perspective of the subject.

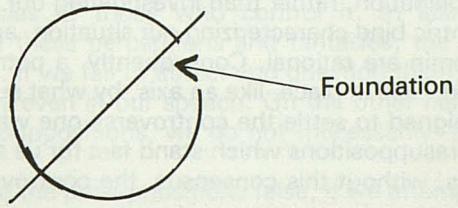
Consider the historical picture of slaves as irresponsible, lazy, shiftless, clumsy and so on. It does not include the perspective of Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth. They are ignored as exceptions. Nor has it room for explanations such as that of Lunsford Lane who said that in front of whites, he never appeared as intelligent as he really was.⁶ Furthermore, certain presuppositions underlie the historical picture of slaves, for example, the idea of slaves as unintelligent, dull-witted beings--presuppositions which color the way we read fact. The act of breaking a tool will be perceived one way if intelligence is attributed to the person and another way if it is not.

Someone backed into a corner, trapped in servitude with no chance of escape (the Underground Railroad operated only in the northern most of the Southern states), acts to let herself know that at least she exists, acts to assert her will as independent of that of her master. If nothing else, she can slow him down (by breaking tools, for example). Her reaction to her situation may or may not be a planned act of survival, but it succeeds

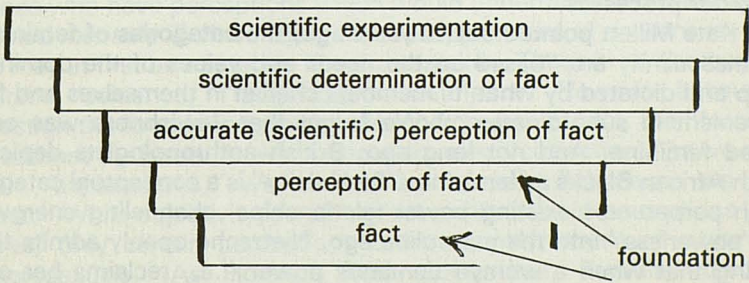
as an act of (immediate) survival only if her master does not perceive it as such. Yet in the name of impartiality, white historians have avoided naming the acts of slaves which lend themselves to slave stereotypes, Sabotage.

Perception of reality is a matter of consensus in that the foundation of our judgment is not fact; rather, what *counts* as fact and what counts as error is embedded in our judgments. We *see* behavior as qualitatively different depending on whether we attribute it to slaves or masters, and depending on whether we attribute it to females or males. We've all come across the list of corporate qualities: a businessman is aggressive, a businesswomyn is pushy; he's confident, she's conceited; he's enthusiastic, she's emotional...etc.

To help me grasp some of the implications of the concept of consensus reality, one of Wittgenstein's remarks has proven invaluable: A foundation goes unquestioned, like an axis, held in place by what surrounds it.⁷



On the traditional building block theory, a foundation is like a bedrock; it holds up, it justifies, all else.



We can discover the foundation of patriarchy by attending not to fact but to what goes unquestioned--our male-identification, the male myth of femininity. "Femininity" and "masculinity" are not empirical con-

cepts. They are not based on fact, they are not subject to refutation.⁸ Rather, they tell us how to read fact, they function as conceptual categories to determine (for the unquestioning observer) our perception of female and male behavior. And they are held in place by what surrounds them.

For example, those who argue that wimmin have been conditioned to be the way we are hold the male myth of femininity in place, like an axis. The whole nature/nurture controversy fails to question that "way we are," accepting without challenge the male naming of wimmin as passive. The burning issue concerns whether we are that way because of our genetic makeup or because of our social conditioning. (In a sense, I find myself drawn to the geneticists; they imply that wimmin and Third World men will forever remain wimmin and Third World men while the social conditionists hope that one day, with proper conditioning, we'll all be white males.) Both sides of the nature/nurture dichotomy approach wimmin as a curious phenomenon, different from men, who need little or no explanation, rather than investigating our behavior in terms of the androcentric bind characterizing our situation, and with the presumption that wimmin are rational. Consequently, a patriarchal foundation goes unnoticed, held in place, like an axis, by what surrounds it, by investigations designed to settle the controversy one way or the other. Without certain presuppositions which stand fast for us and on which everything else turns, without this consensus, the controversy makes no sense.

COERCION

In *Beyond God the Father* Mary Daly noted that wimmin have had the power of naming stolen from us.⁹ The descriptions that pass for descriptions of wimmin's behavior are not our descriptions. These descriptions, which label men the norm and wimmin deviant,¹⁰ which define wimmin in relation to men or not at all,¹¹ do not come from us. I reject accounts of wimmin's behavior as passive (just as I deny accounts of slave behavior as clumsy, docile, etc.) These are not *our* names, *our* perceptions, *our* processes.

As Kate Millett pointed out 10 years ago, the categories of femininity and masculinity are "based on the needs and values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates."¹² We forget that Jewishness was once named feminine. And not long ago, British anthropologists depicted South African Blacks as feminine. "Femininity" is a conceptual category which perpetuates existing power relationships, channeling energy of the "powerless" into the masculine ego. Nietzsche openly admits this, arguing that when a womyn demands power (i.e., reclaims her own power), she sheds her femininity and "unlearns" her fear of man. When such a womyn emerges, "the *man* in man...is no longer desired by society."¹³

Consensus reality is coercive in that the androcentric traps we face throw us into the arms of predators to seek protection, thereby giving

over our gynergy/power. Secondly, it is coercive in that our naming is not our own. Thirdly, it is coercive in that language limits thought to some extent, and our language is androcentric and male supremacist.

Muriel Schulz traces the ways in which most neutral words for wimmin eventually acquired "debased connotations or obscene references or both."¹⁴ Julia Stanley proves that the terms for wimmin who relate sexually to men can be mapped on a semantic field with length of contact and cost as parameters. As she points out, the stereotype of the sexually available womyn (1) provides a "model against which to judge all wimmin good or bad," based on our availability to men, and (2) asserts that wimmin relate only to males.¹⁵ Julia Stanley and Susan Robbins show how androcentric perception operates in language, perpetuating cultural values through sex-marked predicates assigned "on the basis of cultural assumptions regarding 'appropriate' behaviors for [wimmin] and men," yielding cognitive gaps and negative semantic spaces.¹⁶ We haven't the vocabulary to express, exchange, develop certain ideas. The consensus thus becomes a conspiracy of silence.

To some extent, language limits thought.¹⁷ It institutionalizes the perceptions and fantasies of those who control it. In learning the language we internalize these perceptions and fantasies, the "presuppositions" of patriarchy. If we fail to detect and question them, we contribute to the consensus even in our speech. On the other hand, when we do question the presuppositions, we do not (necessarily) shake the consensus.

If we attempt to prove the presuppositions false, if we attempt to prove the stereotypes false, we snap back into patriarchal logic. As Julia Stanley points out, the "truth or falsity of the stereotype is irrelevant, the mere act of naming is sufficient in itself."¹⁸ For example, if we argue that Blacks are not less intelligent than whites or that wimmin are not more passive than men, we imply these statements make sense--that even though false, they are coherent and can be investigated.

Alternatively, if we simply reject the presuppositions, we do not undermine the consensus, instead men in power undermine *our* credibility. This is the fourth and most forceful way consensus reality is coercive: Those who have perceptions which would undermine the consensus are labeled *mentally ill*. If we reject the presuppositions of consensus reality, we may at first be treated as if we're mistaken. Those in power may even marshal "evidence," "fact," to prove our "error." However, because we question the foundation which colors perception of fact, the "facts" fail to address the issue. As we continue to resist "correction," as we refuse their "explanations," we are labeled mentally ill because we reject "fact." While objectivity is nothing but a collection of perceptions which agree, only certain perceptions count--namely, those of white male heterosexuals. (As Florence Rush points out, Freudian theory is paradigmatic of the "gaslighting" of wimmin's perceptions by men in power--in this case the perception that fathers, protectors, are predators.¹⁹)

Patriarchal consensus is a trap. If we resist the consensus in isolation, we may lose our sanity, i.e., the confidence of our perceptions. Passing into the collective political process of Lesbian feminism involves a quantum leap, one I take without effort every time I enter the pages of *Sinister Wisdom*. Lesbian feminism as an alter state of consciousness creates an entirely different foundation, a radically different consensus, and brings us to the brink of madness. As Mary Daly astutely pointed out in another context, our tactic must be one of transforming the collective imagination so that male perception, distortion, fantasy loses its *credibility*.²⁰ Our task is to render the concept of a male-identified woman, the concept of rape,²¹ *senseless*.

¹My love to two warm fuzzy dykes, Julia Stanley, who held my hand while I first worked through much of this. Also, my love to Diane Hugaert who gave me gynergy as I worked on this.

²I put quotation marks around the word *vulnerable* because within a womyn-identified space, a womyn who opens herself up does so from a position of strength, able to take the changes that come. However, under patriarchy, where males realize power in the form of control, vulnerability can only mean weakness. In this paper, my reference to vulnerability is to its patriarchal manifestation.

³See also Barbara Ruth's fine discussion of the politics behind "aesthetic" judgments about fat wimmin, *Lesbian Connection*, III, 8 (Mar. 1978), p. 4.

⁴Jean Carey Bond and Pat Peery, "Is the Black Male Castrated?" *The Black Woman*, ed. Toni Cade (NY: New American Library, 1970), pp. 113-19.

⁵Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1975), pp. 78-86.

⁶Gilbert Osofsky, ed., *Puttin' On Ole Massa* (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), p. 9.

⁷Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), remark 152.

⁸Sarah L. Hoagland, "On the Status of the Concepts of Masculinity and Femininity," *Transactions of the Nebraska Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 4, Aug. 1977, pp. 169-172.

⁹Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 9.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹¹Conversation with Julia P. Stanley.

¹²Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (NY: Doubleday, 1969), p. 26.

¹³Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, transl. Marianne Cowan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., A Gateway Edition, 1955), pp. 161-170. Quotation from p. 167.

¹⁴Muriel Schulz, "The Semantic Derogation of Woman," *Language and Sex*, ed. Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1975), pp. 64-76.

¹⁵Julia P. Stanley, "Paradigmatic Woman: The Prostitute," *Papers in Language Variation*, eds. David L. Shores and Carole P. Hines (Birmingham, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. 303-321.

¹⁶Julia P. Stanley and Susan W. Robbins, "Sex-marked Predicates in English," unpublished paper.

¹⁷This is a thesis emerging from the work of Julia P. Stanley, and she and I have been working on it. We plan to expand and develop it in the future.

¹⁸Julia P. Stanley, *op. cit.*

¹⁹Florence Rush, "The Freudian Coverup: The Sexual Abuse of Children," *Chrysalis*, 1.

²⁰Mary Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

²¹Conversation with Leigh Star.

“It’s hard to play the flute when your lip is quivering...”

interviews with DEIDRE MCCALLA
and LLENA DE MADRUGADA

Interviews edited by MAB SEGREST

**First Interview with Deidre McCalla. Chicago, January, 1978.
Interviewers Sarah Hoagland and Joanna Spilman.**

Q: *When you are writing music, do you set aside a certain amount of time? What’s your creative process like?*

Deidre: I’m a great procrastinator, so I do my best not to set up a certain amount of time, because then I just sit there staring at the walls, thinking, “What an interesting crack that is on the ceiling.” It is really bad when I realize I am reading the yellow pages to avoid doing it. I find I do need a time and a space to myself, but those spaces more or less turn out to be accidental. I mean, I could have a lot of time and space to myself but not an idea in my head to do anything, in which case nothing happens. It changes. Sometimes I get an idea in the night, and if I don’t get up and work on it right then, I don’t remember it in the morning. That’s been helped a lot, now that I finally got a tape recorder. Once, if the idea caught and I didn’t deal with it then, it was lost. So that’s getting better. An idea catches me somewhere and it just has to get out. I can either save it on the tape recorder, hopefully, if it’s a melody, or a line, chord, lyric idea. Or a lot of times it’s an emotion, in which case I have to deal with it right away. It’s like walking around and you have to shit and you don’t go to the bathroom. (I’m into body processes.) You are walking around and you’re constipated or something when it’s an emotion, and that more or less works itself out.

Q: *I’ve seen you play alone, but I understand you had a band in Lincoln. What were some of the good points and difficulties in forming the band and in playing with it, then arriving in Chicago and playing alone? Are you thinking about having a band again?*

Deidre: There are a lot of good points to working with other musicians. It’s not fun, really, after a while, being up there by yourself. It’s very hard to experiment and try new things because you’re totally responsible for



every aspect of the performance. I couldn't practice or experiment with doing lead work, because it's very hard to do lead while required to play rhythm on the guitar. If someone else, a piano player, is up there taking care of the rhythm section, then I can play lead over it and experiment in that way too. Trying new lines. Also working with other people. It's a different input. There's a thousand different lines that can go on simultaneously that add to that song or give impetus to another song and give you more experience. So it's more desirable to work with a band. The problem that I had in Lincoln was finding people who play well but don't want to. Which is entirely their option. But it's very hard for me to just let lie. I play because I have to. I live by it. So what it amounted to was me running around telling people that they should play and pulling them out of closets and beating them over the head and rearranging my whole life to fit the one time they could show up for rehearsal. And maybe they'd be there. And my wanting to push them. My not being really directive. Which in a situation where no one really knows what they're doing just turns into chaos. I'd spend a lot of energy wondering if they were going to show up. It wasn't really a concept because there wasn't that commitment there. So it was basically a back-up band situation. And instead of being responsible for one hundred percent of what was happening I was responsible for ninety percent, which for me was



photos by ROSALIND MORGAN

the same thing. It showed me that I really would like to work with a band, but I need people who are committed to music. Not necessarily to my music but to some idea of what we could do. Which is why I started working with Llena. And we're more and more working toward solidifying our commitment to each other. I think what I'm going to do now is to let that happen. And I think eventually someone's going to come along and say, "Hey, I play bass," and then we'll have a bass player. Then someone will come along and say, "Hey, I play piano." Then there'll be four of us. And the commitment will be there initially, which I think is the most important thing. I like to play with people who are better at their instruments than I am, because I can really learn in that situation. And I think I will get those type of people. Once they see that there is definitely something they can plug into that is happening.

Q: *If you could play one concert, just one super-fantasy concert, what would it be?*

Deidre: This is my total fantasy. I went to this private school. The day before graduation I walked around the campus crying, looking at a tree and dissolving into tears, seeing the Hudson River Liner train going choo-chooing down the track and realizing how many times I'd ridden on that train. I went to see my eighth grade teacher and dissolved into a total mess. I stood on the athletic field, bawling in tears at the universe,

and swore that one day I'd come back and give a concert on the athletic field of my high school. My own little Woodstock. That would be my fantasy.

Q: *Women only?*

Deidre: Yeah, probably. My high school was women only. Why not?

Second interview, May, 1978, Madison, Wisconsin. Deidre McCalla & Lena de Madrugada. Interviewer Sarah Hoagland.

Sarah: *Lena, what is your musical background? How have you related your politics and your music?*

Lena: My background is playing in orchestras...

Sarah: *First chair?*

Lena: Yes, first chair mostly. I felt very lost in that medium, in that I felt very unable to express what I had to say. The way I always felt was the way baby robins look in a nest--one worm dangling out and everybody reaching for the worm and competing, and the orchestra was very much the same way. All the principal players fighting to be heard over the din. Don't get me wrong, I think orchestral music can be really beautiful. But I didn't feel that I was able to personally express what I had to say. The fact that I'm playing with Deidre and I'm writing my own songs now and playing Deidre's music--playing with a woman, primarily to women audiences, is political. It's wonderful. I do feel now as if my music and my life and my politics and my feelings about what are important to me in both my life and music have all come together in one thing when I play. All the elements merge when I'm playing women's music.

Sarah: *How does your lesbianism relate to what you're doing?*

Lena: I couldn't have played women's music when I was straight. I was too much into competing with men, accepting their terms, their standards, their judgments. My whole musical life was competition. Auditioning for this, beating someone else out for that, getting to play the solo. The music business in general is competitive, but especially in orchestral playing or training for competitions. The whole thing was set up that way all through the schools I went to.

Sarah: *Did you actually try to beat people out?*

Lena: Oh, yeah, definitely. It was real important. In high school--and this is something that is really hard for me to admit--I would cast spells on the women I was competing against. I'm sure I would have cast them on men but at that time no boys played the flute in high school. And I did win. It never got to the point with me where I was unable to relate to the other flutists as musicians. I was always thought to be weird because I developed close friendships with flute players. Very unusual, because of the competition that got between women a lot.

Sarah: *Do you see your identity as a lesbian as getting you out of your competitiveness?*

Llena: I pretty much got out of competitiveness in college. Way before I became a lesbian. But I would definitely put it down to--which is so close to being a lesbian anyway--being able to relate to the women, being able to develop friendships with the women I was playing with. My beginning to view music as an expressive thing, and completely noncompetitive, was being able to relate to individual women.

Sarah: *Do you still nevertheless feel competitive with men?*

Llena: I do. I was at the conservatory practicing the other day and found myself not wanting to play the things I needed to work on, but wanting to play the things I already played well, in the practice room, because I knew men would probably hear. I didn't want to make a mistake or practice something I wasn't really good at yet. I couldn't experiment. I wasn't free to transcend and get down to practicing. When we play in a completely male atmosphere, I play a lot of notes. I show off my technique. I find myself not being able to transcend and lay back. I'm not worried about the *music*, I'm not into the music, I'm worried about *impressing somebody*. And that's not music.

Sarah: *Would both of you talk some about your playing together--the communication, vibes, your feelings about what happens when you're playing? You two just got together in December--six months ago, right?--and you've been working in the same house together two months. How has your relationship musically evolved?*

Deidre: I think for the first couple of months that we were practicing and doing stuff together, I always had in my head that we were practicing for a specific gig or purpose, and the practice was always tainted by that. Now what I find is happening, and it didn't really happen until Llena moved up here, is that we're practicing because the music is good. And all of a sudden it doesn't matter if we perform. We're having fun and we're finding out things about the music and each other. That's a real different approach for me. Now, when Llena and I practice, it takes a long time. She'll play two notes, and I'll start crying.

Llena: Yes, and it's very hard to play the flute when your lip is quivering.

Sarah: *Talk some about performances. Deidre, you mentioned that when you were a solo act you really wanted someone up on stage with you. Is that different now?*

Deidre: Yes, it is. Of the people I've played with, Llena is the most proficient with her instrument. She's the first person I've played with I haven't had to worry about on stage. The people I've worked with have been very good but they have always looked to me for direction. What I was looking for was the support so that I wouldn't have to be directing everything that was happening. Llena and I are able to tune in to each other without laying a burden of "You're in charge." I don't have to worry about if she's going to miss a beat, or if I need to repeat a line. She's versatile enough.

Llena: What she's saying is that I'm competent. That I'm professional. There's something that I noticed that's more for me on a spiritual level

and that's when we're playing--when we first got together I was anxious about playing the right thing. I wanted to fit into the music. I wanted what I was playing to be complementary to what the song already was. I was playing above the music, flittering around on top. The more we play together, the more I sink in, the deeper the level, the more I transcend and relax and settle into the music and just am able to listen and play at the same time and try and capture the mood and the feeling, listen to the words, make what I'm playing more appropriate. When we were playing "Rippling Water" and "Mountain Moving" suddenly I was just listening to the words. I was seeing the images in the song, and it took over my fingers. It was a unified thing, it wasn't my fingers, my instrument, my mind. Everything was working together and the flute was really playing itself. It was really, really nice.

Sarah: *What kind of commitments, then, musically, have you made?*

Llena: My commitment to women's music started when I came out. I was considering giving up music altogether after free-lancing for three years in Chicago, to become a feminist therapist. I felt that I needed to do something with women and I thought maybe that's how I could be most effective. Then I realized there was women's music and I didn't have to do that to be effective and to do something that was meaningful to me. My freelancing kind of dwindled after that. I refused to play any more weddings. I weeded out my male flute students and really stopped orchestral jobs altogether. I'm not playing any music that I don't consider women's music now at all. So I guess I'm real committed to that. My commitment to Deidre is very, very strong. When I first heard you play I got really excited and could hear a flute in your playing. I got together with you soon afterwards to play, and it felt really right to me. The original plan was that you were going to come down from Milwaukee and we'd play some gigs together. That was real frustrating to me. We'd get something going, then you'd leave and come back, and I was forgetting the music a lot because I didn't know it that well. I was really fed up with Chicago. My move up here is part of that commitment. I'm here primarily for music. I'm here and I'm able to play all day and there's a piano in the house and there's music around and there's the conservatory, and we can rehearse more often. And there's music on and constant reacting to music and talking about music and sifting over new songs and going to concerts. I think I'm real committed. I am a musician anyway, and now I'm defining myself as a musician in women's music anyway. So, as opposed to the other people who played with you, you have a lot less to worry about.

Deidre: That's the difference. You are a musician, where I'd been running into people who just play, who never feel like they could make money to make a decent living....You *did* slide up to me on the couch the other day and say, "You know, it's not a bad life, playing, food stamps, school. You know, it's not a bad life."

Solitude

Solitude grew to be a woman
never once knowing
a moment's peace
taken from her mother
to serve as slave girl
at someone's feet
while the wild bird within her
struggled to be free.

*I will not drink your waters, sir
I will not speak your tongue
I will not bear your burden, sir
I will not be the one
I will not be the one.*

Solitude took flight at midnight
vanished like twilight
into dawn
and each time they thought they'd found her
they'd look and Solitude
would be gone
leaving only her silent laughter
that seemed to always linger on.

I was born in the golden age
when my people could walk through our homelands
without fear
I am the child of a noble race
dying in disgrace in your foreign
hemisphere
Do what you will
but I will not
be kept here.

Some say she knew the devil
Some say that Solitude
merely knew her mind
And the day they finally caught her
the sight of Solitude
nearly struck them blind
and as they led her to the gallows
the people heard her cry...



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PHOTO BY IRENE YOUNG

the snake woman

she is a snake woman
she has no eyelids
she wears the skins of dead animals
they always smell like death
when she enters the room, the air parts like a river
her hands are too large, and always roaming
what they touch shrivels a little
and when light touches her skin, it does not yield

do you recognize this woman?

the snake woman has a pet lizard named Muerte
(that's Spanish for Death)
she crawls on the belly of night
undoing everything
and all of her dances are deadly
if she makes love to you
your body will burn like a night torch
but if you sleep in her arms
by morning you will be all husk
bone-dry, skin empty

do you know this woman?

the snake woman lives underthings
when she builds fires they are for burning
when light strikes her reptile eyes
she turns slowly, the light dying
gathers the jungle around her, and leaves
but we can hear for days the sounds of animals crying
and the scent in the air is of ancient rain

do you recognize this woman?

look in the mirror
under candlelight
trace with your finger your eyelids
find what lies under the skin
feel your own blood dance rising

this woman is bad
her name begins with your initials
her face is very familiar
this woman moves the way your body does
crawling toward morning

do you know this woman?
do you know her?
do you know?

-martha courtot

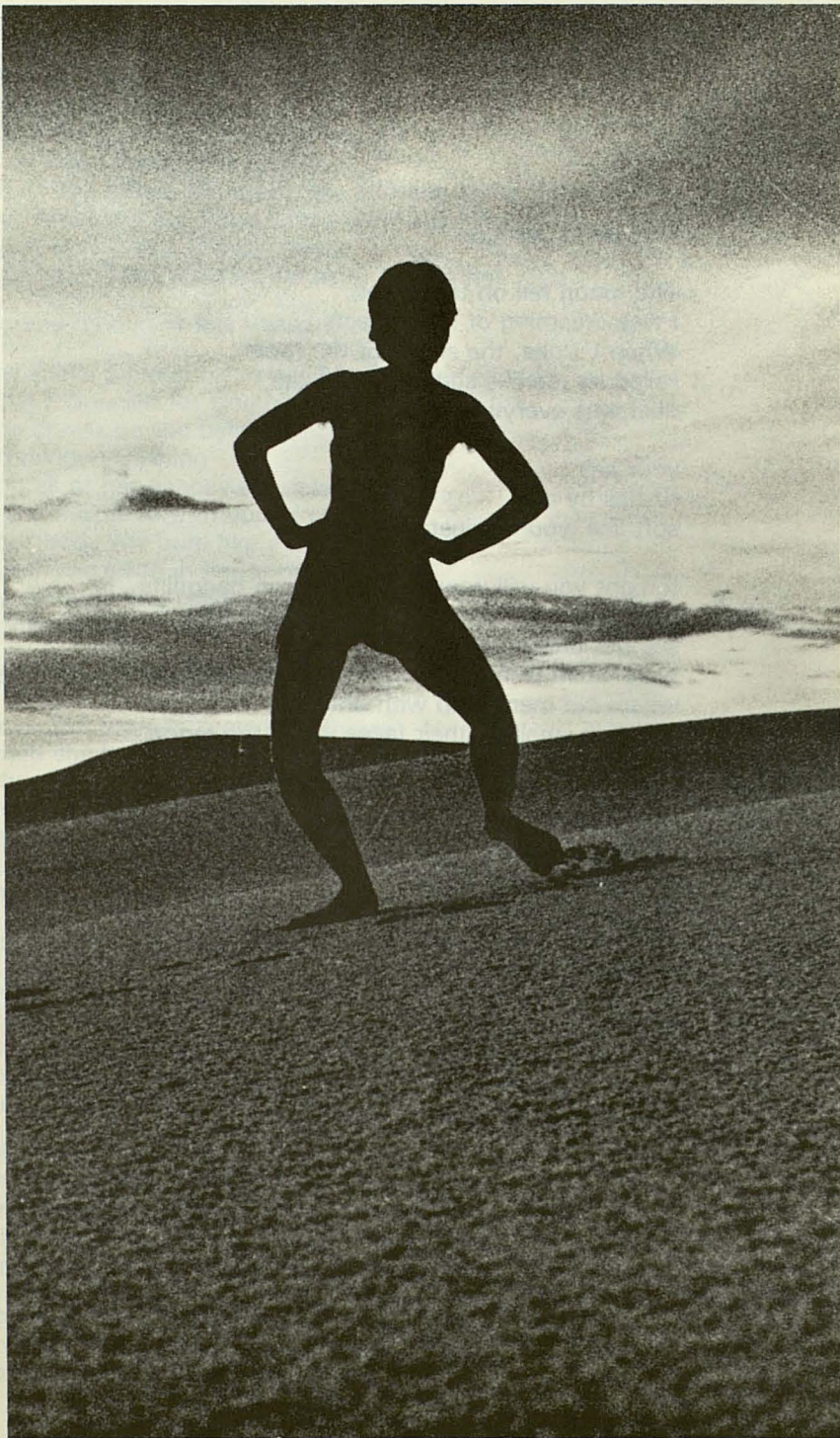
Our Lives Tangle

The moon fell on top of me,
I was dreaming of blood pacts.
When I woke, the shape of the room
sailed by me like some ghostly kite,
dust was everywhere

your hair
rushes by me
soft like wool against my face

tonight you will wrap the children in bedquilts
take up the broom over your left shoulder
slip out under the moon rays
walk down Burnside till you reach the bridge
where old men sleep with bottles
and sick smells. their faces under the moon
show white. you pass them silently,
they don't wake.
the concrete steps are crusted with garbage,
vegetable bones, broken glass.
you climb them, silent
as your cloud of hair, only your coat
makes whoosh sounds in the wind.
at the top of the bridge you
turn to the water
lower your broom and begin
to sweep the stairs.
you look down into the moon staring up from the river,
your face gives light like the moon.

-Melanie Kaye



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Madeline Tiger Bass' latest book of poetry is *Keeping House in This Forest*, published last year by Farleigh Dickinson University.

Sandy Boucher is the author of a book of short stories *Assaults and Rituals*, published in 1975 by Mama's Press.

Caron is a printer, living in Charlotte, N.C. She does many different things, all characterized by Lesbian imagination.

Martha Courtot "I struggle daily with the roles of poet, mother, lesbian in a culture which supports none of them. I believe in the power of women, and want for my daughters a world in which they can be strong, loving and whole. I would like for myself and all women to look at the Snake Woman in themselves, feel her power and beauty and accept the responsibility this power entails." Martha has published two books of poetry, *Tribe* and *Journey*, with PearlChild Productions.

Mary Daly teaches Feminist Ethics in the department of theology at Boston College.

Marilyn Frye teaches feminist philosophy at Michigan State in East Lansing.

Vicki Shanamary Gabriner is a free-floating dyke who lives in Atlanta, Georgia most of the time. She is the author of *Sleeping Beauty, a lesbian fairy tale*.

Gingerlox lives in Denver, Colorado. *Berrigan* is her first novel.

Sarah Hoagland teaches philosophy at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago.

Peggy Holland lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. This is the first article she has published.

Melanie Kaye lives in Portland, Oregon.

Audre Lorde's latest book of poetry is *Coal* (W.W. Norton, 1978).

Judith McDaniel lives in upstate New York. She and Maureen Brady have recently started a feminist press called Spinsters, Ink.

Jan Millsapps lives in Rock Hill, South Carolina. "Parthenogenesis" is one of 8 animated films she has produced and shows under the name "Janimations."

mh north "As a child i wanted to be a writer--at the death (suicide by gun) of my identical twin shortly after our seventeenth birthday i began writing poems. Sarah Lawrence offered strength--Muriel Rukeyser, Jane Cooper and Grace Paley--and finally after eight years of marriage and two sons i realize acutely how much communication with other women means to me..."

Melanie Perish is a lesbian feminist who lives in New York City. A chapbook of her work *Notes of a Daughter from the Old Country* is available through Motherroot Publications (214 Dewey Street, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15218).

Minnie Bruce Pratt teaches English and lives with Emma, Ti-Grace, June, and Rita, her cats.

Adrienne Rich's MLA talk, published here in a slightly revised and expanded version, has become the germinating point for a longer essay on feminism and racism, on which she is now working. She sees the present version as a kind of work-in-progress.

Susan Robbins is a stand-up comic, as well as a linguist, and lives in South Dakota.

Thyme Seagull "I am derived from Judaism and am headed by Amazonia."

Julia Stanley is a Lesbian dreamer-schemer, as well as a linguist, and lives in Nebraska.

Arny Christine Straayer lives alone but loves to receive cards with pictures of women on the front. She has been in jail once for shop-lifting, is constantly cutting her short red hair, and will always revere her mother, Mona.

Jennifer Turner "I am a lesbian poet living and working in New York City, and a recent graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, where last year I won the Academy of American Poets Poetry Contest."

In *Sinister Wisdom* Issue 5, we listed Diana Press books in print as of January, 1978. The collection of Elsa Gidlow's Lesbian love poetry *Sapphic Songs: Seventeen to Seventy* was mistakenly omitted. As of June, 1978, *Sapphic Songs* should be ordered from Women in Distribution, Box 8858, Washington, D.C. 20003.

FEMINARY: A LESBIAN FEMINIST JOURNAL FOR THE SOUTH

Feminary, one of the oldest surviving feminist publications in the Southeast, announces a shift in focus, from a local feminist magazine to a lesbian feminist journal for the South.

Feminary is produced by a lesbian feminist collective in the Piedmont of North Carolina. As Southerners, as lesbians, and as women we need to explore with others how our lives fit into a region about which we have great ambivalences--to share our anger and our love.

We want to hear Southern lesbians tell the stories of women in the South--our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, and friends. We feel we are products of Southern values and traditions but as lesbians we contradict their most destructive parts. We see the good and want to get rid of the bad; and we feel it important to explore how this Southern experience fits into the American pattern.

We are committed to working on issues of race because they are vital to an understanding of our lives as they have been, as they are and could be; and to understanding and overcoming differences of class and age among lesbians as well.

We want to encourage feminist and lesbian organizing in a region whose women suffer greatly in their lack of political power.

We want to provide an audience for Southern lesbians who may not think of themselves as writers but who have important stories to tell--stories that will help to fill the silences that have obscured the truth about our lives and kept us isolated from each other.

We want to know who we are.

We want to change women's lives.

We are soliciting manuscripts in the following categories:

- *news and events*--of local lesbian communities
- *storytelling*--sketches, journal entries, interviews about growing up Southern and living in the South today
- *articles on political theory and organization*--with emphasis on practical tools and problems
- *poetry and short fiction*--toward establishing a network of Southern lesbian writers striving for "a language not yet known to man" (V. Woolf)
- *feminist scholarship and criticism*--essays on the Southern experience from a radical perspective in a non-academic style; reclaiming our past
- *humor*--especially satire and parody
- *graphics*.

Subscriptions: \$5.00 (3 issues/year). **FEMINARY, Box 954, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 27514.**

SUBMISSIONS

Sinister Wisdom welcomes unsolicited manuscripts and art work. Please type (double-spaced) all written work. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope and a 2-3 line description of yourself. At this time, we can pay only with a subscription or copies of the issue in which your work appears. Please indicate which "payment" you prefer. Allow 6 weeks for reply.

IMPORTANT: Please mail POETRY directly to Susan Leigh Star, 52 Mars Street, San Francisco, Ca. 94114. All other manuscripts, correspondence and art work should be sent to *Sinister Wisdom*, PO Box 30541, Lincoln, NE 68503.

BACK ISSUES, WHILE THEY LAST

Issue 1 (Summer '76): "solid politically, beautiful to look at, breaks the male language barrier..." 72 pp. \$2.00

Book issue 2 (Fall '76) *Lesbian Writing and Publishing*, guest editor Beth Hodges: Susan Griffin on breaking the conspiracy of silence; June Arnold and Bertha Harris re-inventing the world in Lesbian fiction; panel on reading, writing & teaching Lesbian literature; essays on a woman-identified aesthetic; reviews; interviews; photographs; listing of Lesbian titles (with ordering info) and 21 Lesbian writers on why, when & how we publish with women. 136 pp. \$2.50

Issue 3 (Spring '77): Sold out

Issue 4 (Fall '77): Stories of mothers and daughters and witches and lovers; Joanna Russ' tale for the girlchild in all of us; Lesbian separatism from the inside; photo-essay; interview; reviews, letters and poetry. 96 pp. \$2.25

Issue 5 (Winter '78): Leigh Star, "Lesbian Feminism as an Altered State of Consciousness"; Judith Schwarz, "Researching Lesbian History"; Michelle Cliff on speechlessness; Lesbian Day speech by Barbara Grier; fiction; poetry; photo-essay; reviews; interview. 104 pp. \$2.25

(Add 36¢ postage for every 1-2 copies ordered)

SINISTER WISDOM POSTER STILL AVAILABLE

In the spring of 1977, a Tee Corinne solarized photograph of two wymyn making love appeared on the cover of *Sinister Wisdom 3*, followed by a deluge of requests for a poster. The poster was printed in the summer of 1977: a duplicate of that cover, black on gray, 17"x22". You can have your own for a contribution of \$3.00 toward the survival of *Sinister Wisdom*, plus 50¢ to cover mailing costs. (They make nice gifts for friends, too; bulk rates available.)

Send \$3.50 per poster to: *Sinister Wisdom*, Box 30541, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68503.

Also available in feminist bookstores.

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